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ARGOSY

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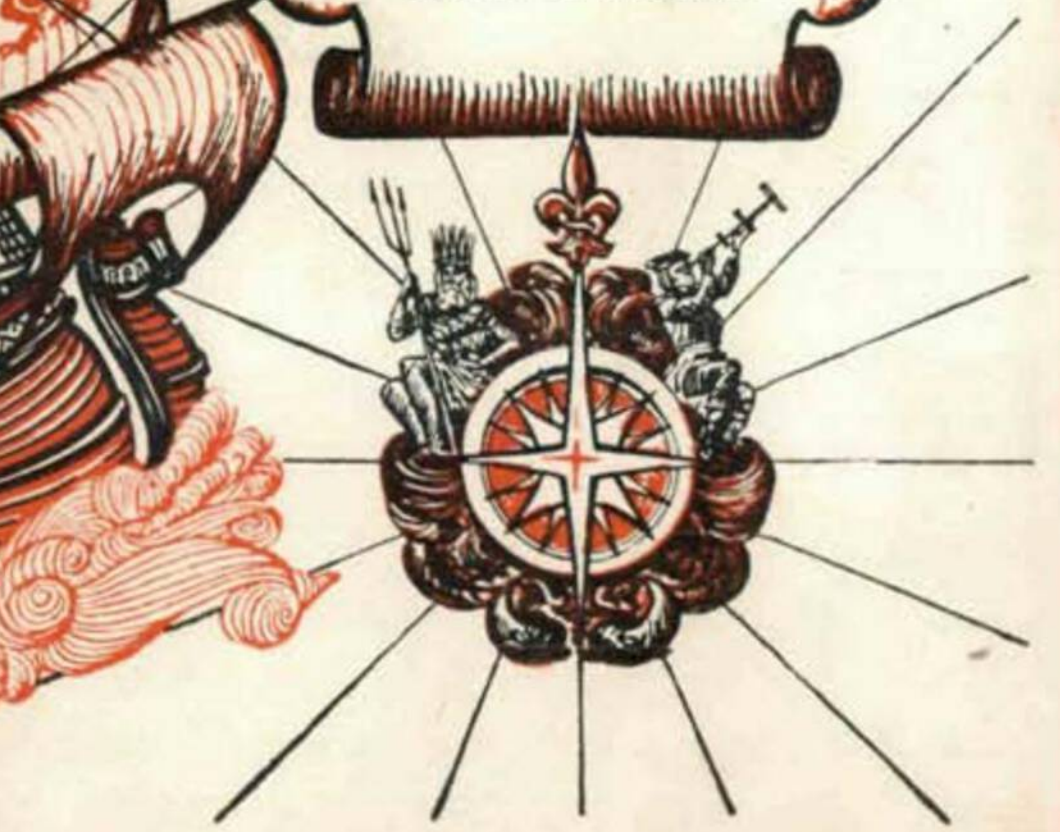

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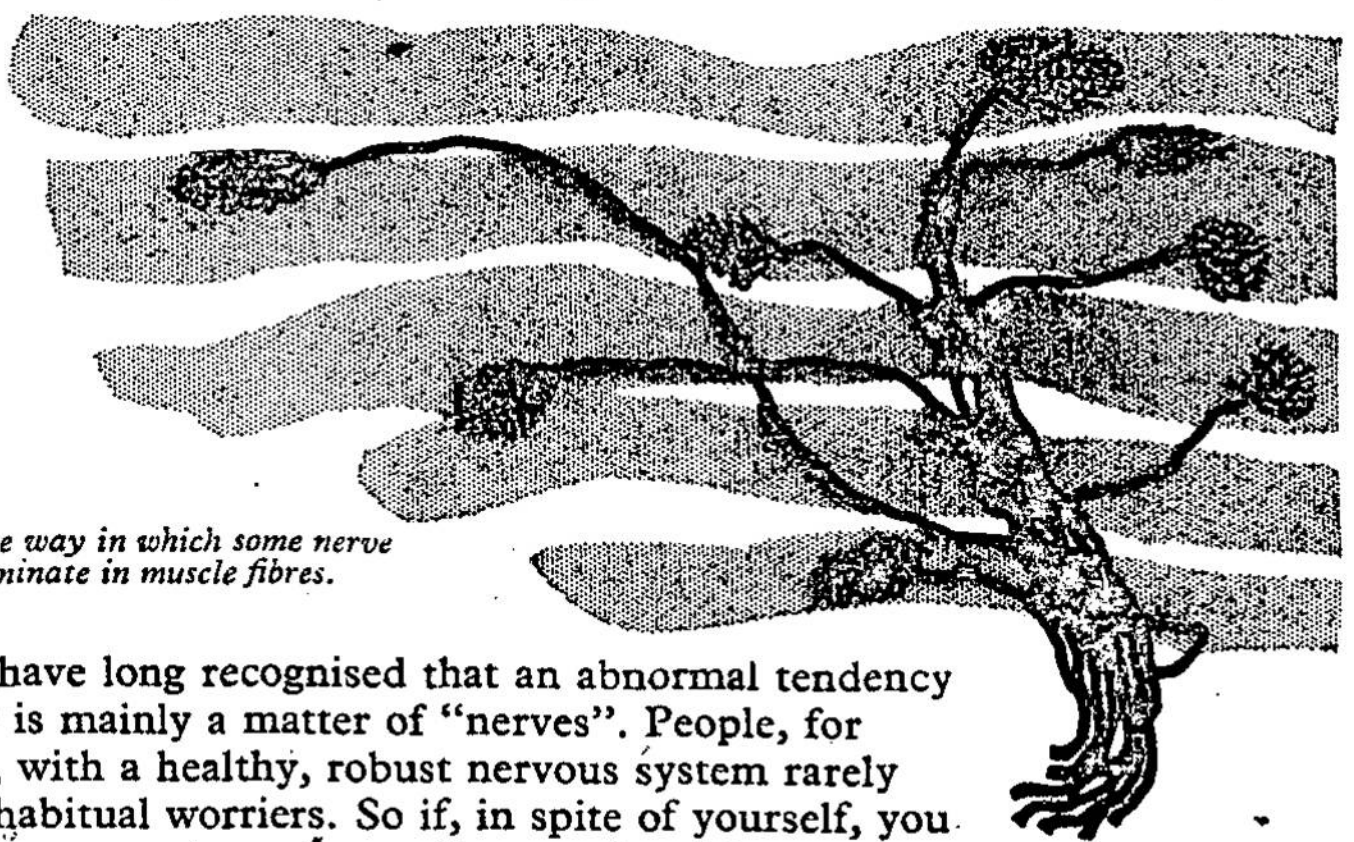

(RIGHT)
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ARGOSY

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Printed in England by PERCY BROTHERS, LTD.; THE HOTSPUR PRESS, MANCHESTER, and published on the 10th of each month by THE AMALGAMATED PRESS, LTD., The Fleetway House, Farringdon Street, London, E.C.4. Registered for Transmission by Canadian Magazine Post. Subscription Rates: Inland and Abroad: £1 0s. 6d. for 12 months, 10s. 3d. for 6 months. Canada: 19s. 6d. for 12 months, 9s. 9d. for 6 months. ADVERTISEMENT OFFICES: Tallis House, Tallis Street, London, E.C.4. Sole Agents: Australasia, Messrs. GORDON & GOTCH, LTD.; South Africa, CENTRAL NEWS AGENCY, LTD.; Federation of Rhodesia and Nyasaland, Messrs. KINGSTONS, LTD.

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PALMA

by ALAN ROSS

THE kind of harbour that builds its hopes on leisure;
Handsome, like a waster, whose natural gifts—
Here water held out open as a hand—
Spin daylight-dazzle into nights of pleasure.

So imagine a waterfront eyed by cathedral windows,
A shuttle of cars along quays, a windmill;
And sails rinsing out light like a laundry,
For a whole island pouched as a pelican's bill.

What is here evident, openly beautiful, is spread
Like a torero's cape to attract, to beguile
The green arm of the harbour pledged to hotels,
Whose terraces flash white as teeth in a smile.

And, looking, one notes the sea, glass-hard,
Cut by the diamonds of yachts; the patience
Of fishing-boats, cinnamon and citron, with bow-images
Of Jesus glossily unreal as kings on court cards;

The bay itself with steamers as obvious as on posters—
All this is doubled at night with lights
Peach-coloured and waxy on water, a port
Punch-drunk with beauty on the oil of coasters.

So one cannot say the harbour here is used,
If using is a means of scraping holds on life;
But rather it distracts the eye, gives penicillin
In the form of sea and palms, or warms us like a wife.

CHICKEN SURPRISE

One needs to be in complete command of oneself to bring off such a dish

by PAUL GALLICO

NEXT time you are touring the château country of France and visit the string of airy castles cresting the hilltops along the placid Loire from Blois to Tours, you surely will drop down from the towered and mullioned keep of the Château Loïret, just below Chaumont, to eat a meal and drink the wine at the famous Auberge Château Loiret at the foot of the castle.

There you will unquestionably partake of that superb and unrivalled speciality of the house, *Poularde Surprise Treize Minets* and find your palate enthralled by the indefinable flavour imparted to the fowl by the mysterious ingredient which is the particular secret of Monsieur Armand Bonneval, host and chef of the Auberge. And like so many, many others before you, you will attempt without success to identify the famous component X which to this day has defied the most educated taste-buds of all France.

You also will encounter Monsieur Bonneval, stocky, red-faced, with short-cut, upstanding, pepper-and-salt hair, youthful-looking because of the energy and kindliness in his face, and Madame Bonneval, a woman of large heart and girth, who, as always in France, will be seated behind the desk in charge of the till and the accounts.

And, either perched on the desk next to Madame Bonneval or twining at the feet of her husband as he appears at the dining-room door to check on the effect of his cooking, you will probably observe a small black-and-white cat—not a particularly beautiful specimen, owing to the fact that she is somewhat cross-eyed, but nevertheless the beloved pet and pride and joy of Monsieur and Madame, your hosts.

As a matter of fact, the famous and succulent recipe is in a way associated with her, Minette being her name. But " Minet " in France is also the generic nickname for cats, just as we call them " puss," and thus a literal translation of the by-now-world-renowned dish of *Poularde Surprise Treize Minets* might be " Chicken-Surprise-in-the-style-of-Thirteen-Cats."

However, when it comes to inquiring of M. Bonneval how this

epicure's delight was named or what it is that makes his *poularde* more tasty, stimulating, and unforgettable than any other in the world, and what unknown ingredient is the key to this miraculous gastronomic blend, you will, I know, run up against a stone wall.

Guarded blueprints for aeroplanes, battle-ships, and submarines are traded on an international bourse, diplomatic confidences are whispered over cocktails, the secrets of the atom bomb have been freely bandied about; but up to this moment, not one single person in the whole world beyond Monsieur and Madame Bonneval has been privy to the secret of the recipe for this famous delicacy. Permit me, then.

In the days prior to the events I am about to narrate, Armand Bonneval, a former assistant chef of the Café de Paris, honourably retired, Cordon Bleu member of the Club de Cent, and now sole owner and proprietor of the Auberge Château Loiret, was consumed with a burning ambition.

In the 1954 Guide Michelin, that tourist's and gourmet's bible, which is the motorist's survey of France, the Auberge was designated by three crossed spoons and forks, denoting a "very comfortable restaurant." This was not at all bad, particularly for a restaurant in a village as small as Loiret, where the usual indication was one crossed spoon and fork or none at all.

But it did not satisfy the artistic and creative soul of Monsieur Bonneval. In his day he had been a great cook. In his old age he longed for the tangible recognition of his genius. A higher rating would likewise make a considerable financial difference to himself and Madame, his partner through forty years of unremitting toil.

The size and location of his Auberge precluded his receiving the four or five crossed utensils more often awarded to the big, de luxe restaurants of Paris, Lyons, Vichy, and Cannes. However, the famous Guide Michelin annual has further signs to distinguish the superior cuisines it has tested and listed in villages and towns throughout France—namely, one, two, or three stars added to the spoons and forks.

Three stars, denoting one of the best tables in the nation, and worthy of a special journey of many miles, were as beyond the reach and hopes of Monsieur Bonneval as the stars that spangled the firmament above the Loire Valley at night. There were but twelve of these awarded in all France.

Nor was there any better chance of achieving two stars, indicating an "excellent cuisine: worth a detour," of which there were but fifty-three examples in all the thousands of restaurants, auberges, hotels, and bistros throughout the land.

But Monsieur Bonneval did yearn most mightily, with his honest heart and Frenchman's pride, to be awarded the addition of the single star which would announce to traveller and native alike that he set *une bonne table dans la localité*, and that the visitor to his board would be rewarded with something special.

If his winning of the three crossed spoons and forks had already made him an important man in the district, the star would elevate him to the status of distinguished citizen. If now they just managed to make both ends meet, the added star would enable them to amass a competency towards their final days. Alas, there was nothing specific that Monsieur Bonneval could do to achieve this ambition, for the matter was not in his hands.

As he would explain sadly to Madame Bonneval, when sitting in their flat above the Auberge after hours, with his beloved Minette purring in his lap, there were literally hundreds of thousands of eating-places throughout France that had to be covered; the inspectors, or official tasters, of the Guide Michelin were only so many; they had but one stomach apiece which would hold only so many cubic centimetres. On a mathematical basis, it might be years before one again appeared to sample the fare at the Auberge Loiret, and perhaps never again in their lifetime.

But even if by some chance one should appear, there was no opportunity for Monsieur Bonneval to prepare the kind of speciality that would be likely to bowl over the taster, for the simple reason that the Guide Michelin conducted its tests and listings with scrupulous integrity and fairness. One never knew when the inspector was in one's midst. He came and went in the guise of an ordinary tourist. The Grand Lottery in Paris was not handled with more honesty and care.

" Ah, if one could but know in advance some time," Monsieur Bonneval would groan, filled with ambition and desire. " Who knows but with the star I should be able to take you to Italy on that little trip we planned so long ago."

And Madame Bonneval would comfort him, " Never mind, Armand. I am sure you will receive your star somehow, because you deserve it. And besides, it would not be fair if you did know in advance."

One summer afternoon a letter arrived for Monsieur Bonneval that caused him to stare as though he could not believe his eyes, and then call loudly for Madame to come and read it to him again, to make sure he had not been deceived. Madame did so, with her circle of additional chins quivering a little. It was short and to the point.

My dear Bonneval: I doubt whether you would remember me, but many years ago you had the occasion to do me a good turn when I was hungry and on my uppers, and I have never forgotten your kindness.

It so happens that I now find myself in a position to return the favour. Through my connections with the Guide Michelin, upon which I shall not elaborate, I am advised that next Friday, the thirteenth, an inspector will be passing through Loiret-sur-Loire, and has been instructed to dine at the Auberge to check on the quality of your meals. I know that your genius will find the best way to make use of this information. Wishing you the very best of luck, I am an old friend who must sign himself

XYZ.

There it was—the bolt out of the clearest of skies. Not only was the longed-for visit to take place, but Monsieur Bonneval was actually to have notice in advance and time to prepare one of his more superb specialities, such as duck stuffed with chopped truffles, liver paste, and *champignons*, with orange sauce, or his own version of *coq au vin*.

" I shall be famous! We shall grow rich! " declared Monsieur Bonneval, feasting his eyes again on the page of the wonderful letter. But then he cried in alarm, " Great heavens! The letter is dated the eighth, but it has been delayed in transit. Friday the thirteenth, when the inspector is to come, is this very day."

It was true. The calendar on the wall displayed a large red " 13." Suddenly the affair assumed an urgency that was not dispelled by the exclamation of Madame Bonneval, who had glanced out of the window, " And that must be he, arriving this very minute! "

A large and glittery car had poked its expensive snout alongside the Auberge and discharged one who could only have spent the major portion of his existence in sampling the finest foods and wines, for he was as fat as a prize pig stuffed for exhibition. He carried the Guide Michelin in his hand, and entered the front door with a combined expression of truculence and expectancy.

At once he became identified in Bonneval's mind as " Monsieur Michelin Taster," friend, enemy, instrument upon which he would play his gastronomic symphony, critic, and bearer of the laurel wreath, or rather, star, that would eventually be bestowed upon him.

However, one thing was patent. There was not a moment to lose. Already flustered by the unexpected imminence of his trial, Monsieur Bonneval rushed off to the kitchen, crying to Madame as he made his exit, " I shall prepare him *Homard dans la Lune*! " Which was not at all what he had meant either to say or to cook.

" Lobster in the Moon " was the last thing in the world he would have dreamt of making for such an important test, knowing full well that with lobster it can be this way or that way, whereas your ducks, chickens, and gigots are always safe.

For the recipe is a tricky one, calling for one large lobster, *bien vivant*—in other words, a brisk and lively fellow—to be extracted, cut up, seasoned with salt and pepper, and sauté in oil and butter, after which the oil is withdrawn and a tablespoon of finely chopped shallots or chives and a whisper of garlic are added. To give this mixture a little authority, a glass of cognac and another of white wine are now introduced, after which three tomatoes are broken into small bits with a half-tablespoonful of chopped parsley and a shot of cayenne pepper, and the whole thing is cooked for twenty minutes in a casserole at a steady heat. The lobster is then removed and stuffed into the " Moon," a hollowed-out, crisp brioche. Now comes the delicate moment. The sauce is thickened with a little cream laced with a shot of brandy and the whole thing poured over the hot, crispy, lobster-filled pastry.

A man wants to be in complete command of himself to bring off a dish like that, particularly when it meant as much as it did to Monsieur Bonneval. That he was not was evidenced when he almost bumped into Minette, the black-and-white cat, as he charged into the kitchen, bellowing loudly for Céleste, the kitchen maid, and Brazon, the man-of-all-work, her lover.

This served only to unnerve him further, for it so happened, not long before, that Minette had been as fortunate as to encounter a gentleman friend in the park of the château who had been able to overlook the unhappy tendency of her eyes to cross, and she was now imminently about to be blessed with the fruits of this genuine affection, and a fair packet of them, too, if one could judge from her size.

Nor was it exactly a happy moment in the life of Céleste, who, a few weeks ago, had been seized with the idea of marrying Brazon, and of course had demanded an increase in pay to support this bizarre notion—a request which Monsieur Bonneval, backed by Madame, had quite sensibly refused, since one did not say yes to such ideas the first time. As a result, Céleste was red-eyed and snuffly a good deal of the time, and not quite herself.

This was a pity, for she was to Monsieur Bonneval what the deft theatre nurse is to the great surgeon. With paring knife and chopping-board, a veteran of a hundred routines, she had stood at his side, ready to supply in an instant what the master needed in the line of utensils, saucepans, casseroles, chopped onions, shaved carrots, bouquets of herbs, and so on.

So there was already a considerable disaster building up in

Monsieur Bonneval's kitchen, let alone its being Friday the thirteenth.

The lobster, when produced from the cold room, not only did not answer to the description of a brisk and lively fellow but, on the contrary, was practically in a state of rigor mortis. Cutting him up, hence, was no longer a culinary gesture, but an autopsy. It was Fate giving Monsieur Bonneval one more chance to evade what it had in store for him. Had he been in his right senses he would have dumped the crustacean corpse into the dustbin and started on something else.

But his mind was imprisoned by that inflexibility and rigidity that, in the face of a crisis, sometimes affects the best of cooks and housekeepers. Monsieur Bonneval was bent on making Lobster in the Moon, and so he rushed onward headlong to his doom.

Almost at once there commenced such a catalogue of kitchen catastrophes as can be appreciated only by the housewife or chef who has battled with the extraordinary breed of gremlins that sometimes arrive to interfere, obstruct, and frustrate, when there is a truly important dinner to be got to the table.

While Céleste reversed her instruction and scraped a soupçon of shallot into a tablespoon of chopped garlic, instead of vice versa, Brazon announced that there appeared to have been a change in the wind, affecting the draught of the huge iron stove, plus a blockage of some sort, and he could seem to put no heat in it, and Odette, the waitress, affected by the mounting tension, upset the soup into the lap of the fat man identified in the mind of Bonneval as Monsieur Michelin Taster. This fetched a bellow of rage from the dining-room, matched only by the sound emerging from the kitchen when Monsieur Bonneval discovered that Céleste, ruminating on the inhumanity of man, had taken his frying-pan, which for eighteen years had known no other cleansing than with salt and a piece of bread, and washed it with kitchen soap and water.

Disaster followed upon disaster. The stove, stuffed with newspapers, straw, kindling, and coke, emitted clouds of acrid smoke, one whiff of which was sufficient to affect the delicate flavours planned by Monsieur Bonneval. The cream pitcher upset in the refrigerator, inundating everything therein, and at the critical moment it transpired that Brazon had misplaced the key to the wine cellar.

Monsieur Bonneval moved as one in the grip of a hideous nightmare. Matters went from bad to worse as a tin of fat caught fire, the handle of his best frying-pan broke, and the lamp upset. Céleste and Brazon went completely off their heads, the latter breaking the egg-beater and short-circuiting the refrigera-

tor, while the former reached a new peak in destructive confusion by putting salt in the egg-whites in place of sugar, and cutting up, on the board reserved for crushing garlic, the almonds destined for the famous *soufflé au curaçao.*

Through all this, red-faced, sweating, the glare as of a wild animal filling his heretofore gentle eyes, struggling to retain his temper and his sanity in the face of trials that would have disjointed a saint, Monsieur Bonneval stolidly attempted to fight his way through the morass of calamities that was engulfing him.

It was a losing battle. Friday the thirteenth had not finished with him yet. For just as he was stirring the delicate *sauce vanille* intended to go with the *soufflé* which was browning in the oven, Madame Bonneval, unnerved by the sounds of panic from backstage, abandoned her post next to the till and invaded the kitchen. Her faith in her husband's culinary powers shaken for the first time, she committed the unpardonable crime of opening the oven door to see how the confection was coming along, just as Brazon unlatched the back entrance, permitting a swirl of cool air to tear through the kitchen and smite the *soufflé* where it would hurt the most.

Purple with outrage, Monsieur Bonneval made a lunge to swing shut the oven door. It was at this precise moment that poor Minette chose to make one of her sagging promenades across the kitchen floor just in time to trip and unbalance Monsieur Bonneval and send the *sauce vanille* splashing onto the top of the range, where it made a most dreadful smell.

Something snapped inside Monsieur Bonneval. Flesh and blood could endure no more. Tortured beyond human endurance, he hauled back his right foot and applied it to the rear end of Minette, who happened to be aimed towards the back door at the moment.

With a terrible scream of outraged indignation, the loaded Minette took off like a blimp released from its moorings, and soaring majestically up into the night, vanished from sight.

Now Monsieur Bonneval turned upon the humans. "*Vache!*" he shouted at his wife. "*Animal!*" he bawled at Céleste. "*Crétin!*" he nominated Odette, the waitress. "*Cochon!*" he dubbed Brazon.

The reactions were immediate. Brazon resigned; Odette vanished; Céleste threw her apron over her head and had hysterics; while Madame Bonneval swept from the kitchen, went upstairs, and locked herself in her room.

Bonneval himself carried in the *soufflé* and placed it before Monsieur Michelin Taster, where it gave a soft sigh and collapsed flatter than an old-fashioned opera-hat.

The fat man took one nibble at the edge of the thing and then let out a roar that shook the dining-room.

"Criminal! Assassin! Poisoner!" he shouted. "You call yourself a chef! The lobster tastes of soap, the coffee of paraffin, and your *soufflé* is flavoured with garlic! Three spoons and forks they have given you, eh?" and at this point he waved the red-covered volume of the Guide Michelin under Monsieur Bonneval's appalled nose. "Well, when I am finished with you, you will no longer be able to swindle innocent travellers! Faker!"

And with this, he tore the napkin from his collar and stalked from the room.

When, a few moments later, the car thundered away from the Auberge, it carried with it, in addition to the indignant fat man, the hopes, ambitions, and large pieces of the broken heart of Monsieur Bonneval.

Monsieur Bonneval was of the breed that wastes no time crying over spilt cream, but faces up manfully to the blows of life, and recovers quickly therefrom. But he needed the aid and companionship of his wife. Pocketing his badly damaged pride, he hurried to the door of Madame's locked room, from which emerged sounds of grief, and spoke through the keyhole.

"Come now, my dear, it is all over. Nothing more can happen. I am punished for my sins. The inspector has departed to make his report, and we shall be poor again. But as long as I have you, I shall not lack the courage to make a fresh start—somewhere in a place where we are not known, perhaps. Come, old friend, we have been through much together. Do not take a little incident so to heart."

From within, Madame Bonneval cried, "Little incident! You called me a cow!"

Obviously, a special effort was required. Monsieur Bonneval now addressed the door as follows: "Dear wife, I was wrong to let petty trifles exasperate me into forgetting myself. But look. Even in my anger against Fate, how careful I was in my choice of animals! For is not the cow the sweetest, the gentlest, the kindest, and the most beautiful in all the kingdom? Does she not, with lavish generosity and warm heart, play mother with her milk to all mankind? Is not her glance melting, her disposition notable, and her character beyond reproach? Does not her soft and expressive face invite caresses?"

He ceased when he heard the key turning slowly in the lock. Thereafter he went downstairs, soothed the waitress, apologized to Brazon, and cured Céleste's hysterics with a promise of a raise in salary should the Auberge not be forced to close.

Notwithstanding the peace declared within his domain, the heart of Monsieur Bonneval was as heavy as a stone, for Minette had not returned. His conscience was as black as the night because of the kick he had bestowed upon her, and particularly in the light of her delicate state of health. He would rather have cut off his right arm than perpetrate an indignity, much less an injury, upon his little friend. He had called and called, but there had been no sign of her.

She had every right to be angry with him—if she was still alive. How, then, to persuade her of his love for her, and his terrible contrition?

The hour was past eleven. He had been calling her since ten. Suddenly an idea smote him. Minette was mad about chicken. He would tempt her with her favourite food.

Purpose now gripped Monsieur Bonneval, and he said to himself, "Little Minette, I shall cook you a *Poularde Surprise Royale*, all for your very own. For you I shall cook this as I have never cooked before, for I am very ashamed of having lost my temper and kicked you from the rear."

He set to at once, and everything seemed to work like magic, as though Friday the thirteenth had expended its malignancy, and Fate was no longer interested in harassing Monsieur Bonneval. The stove functioned like a charm, Brazon was as sharp as a razor, and Céleste was her old, cool, efficient self, anticipating his every wish. Objects not only behaved themselves but positively co-operated, seeming to leap into his hand when he had need of them.

With a series of deft movements he boned the chicken and then stuffed it with goose-liver pâté, truffles, and a stew of giblets and kidneys made in meat stock and laced with a jigger of port.

Poor Minette, he thought as he added the ruby-red liquid, after what she has been through she will be in need of a little stimulant.

Working now with supreme concentration and passion, with the recipe burnt into his memory in the way a conductor knows every note of a great symphony without the score, he set about making a sauce for the bird, using the bones of the pullet, onions, carrots, leeks, celery, and a bouquet of herbs, which he fortified with a half bottle of Bollinger '43. "One gives champagne to expectant mothers," he said to himself as the golden wine frothed into the brown gravy.

Exquisite odours began to fill the kitchen. It was art for love's sake, and like all true artists and lovers, he became inspired and began to improvise as he went along, making a daring and radical experiment with here a herb, there a spice, a bit of smoked fat, a

glass of very old cognac. " For if she is a little drunk she will become mellow and forgive me the more readily," he reasoned.

And then it was, as he ransacked his cupboard of herbs and spices, looking to delight still further the heart and appetite of Minette, that he found and added an ingredient that never before had been a part of *Poularde Surprise Royale* or any other dish.

When the bird was cooked to a turn, he performed some final rites, garnishing it with truffles and *pâté de foie gras*, poured the magnificent sauce over it, partitioned it, and putting one half on a plate, went out into the night with this savoury harbinger of everything good and perfect that man has learnt to do with food.

" Minette! Minette! " he called, placing himself upwind, so that the evening breeze from the Loire would carry the fragrance to every corner of the courtyard where the missing Minette might be lurking. And still there came no answer.

Some time later, painfully and heart-broken and still bearing the dish, he returned to the kitchen, where, at the late hour just before midnight, he found an unaccustomed activity sparked by Madame Bonneval. Coffee was brewing, a *soufflé* was in the process of being mixed by Brazon, and the other half of the *Poularde Surprise Royale* was missing.

" Ah, there you are," Madame greeted him. " What a fortunate thing you decided to cook a *poularde*! Only fifteen minutes ago there arrived a traveller, a poor fellow whose car had broken down. He was starving, and begged for a bit of something cold left over. You can imagine how agreeably surprised he was when I was able to set before him your speciality. He is drinking a bottle of the '47 Loiret Suchez with it."

Monsieur Bonneval stared at his wife, aghast. " But, *Maman*! It is impossible. I cooked this for poor little Minette, whom I kicked so bru—"

He did not finish, for the door leading from the dining-room opened violently, admitting an excited, bespectacled little man with a soup-strainer moustache, wearing a seedy suit, but whose eyes and expression nevertheless appeared to command authority.

He paused for a moment *en tableau*, looking from one to another in the kitchen. Then he rushed to Monsieur Bonneval, threw his arms about him, and kissed him violently on both cheeks.

" It is you! " he cried. " You are the magician who has prepared this delectable, this fabulous, this supreme dish! Chef! Genius! Master! I salute you! Not in thirty-five years have I eaten such a *Poularde Surprise Royale*. And at midnight! A palace of gastronomy, a Sorbonne of cookery! Well, you shall have your reward. A star—no, what am I saying?—two stars! "

And here he paused, and his look changed gradually to one of cunning. "Three stars if you will tell me the secret ingredient in the *poularde*, the only one I was not able to recognize."

Monsieur Bonneval could only gape at him. Could it have been then that the other, that fat one, was not Monsieur Michelin Taster? "I do not—understand," he stammered.

"But it is simple, dear master," the man replied. "Know then that I am Fernand Dumaire, Inspector for the Guide Michelin. I was on my way here to test your cookery when that villain of a vehicle ceased to function. And then, to arrive at midnight and at once to find set before me this masterpiece! Of two stars you are certain, but as a little deal between us, I shall risk the third in exchange for your secret ingredient!"

"The—secret—ingredient?" Monsieur Bonneval repeated.

"But of course. Naturally, I recognized the chervil and the delicate touch of burnet. It took courage to use the basil, and the idea of applying the marjoram to offset the tarragon was capital, while the amount of thyme and sage was perfectly balanced. I should judge the Oporto in the sauce was a trifle more dry than is usual—probably a '39—and the champagne, of course, was Bollinger '43, as anyone with half a palate would notice.

"But one flavour baffles and escapes me, and I, Fernand Dumaire, must know what it is. For you have changed, improved, and glorified *Poularde Surprise Royale*. It has become a new creation and you shall have the honour of naming it. But first tell me the ingredient that has baffled me, in exchange for the third star. Is it a bargain?"

There was a moment of silence. Then Monsieur Bonneval said slowly, "I cannot tell you, Monsieur. I shall be content with the two stars you so generously promised me."

Madame Bonneval stared at her husband as though he were out of his mind, but the taster again fell on his neck and kissed him. "You are right, my friend, and noble, and honest. A great chef must never reveal his secrets. I tempted you and you resisted. Well, two stars and five spoons and forks will distinguish you so that the world will beat a path to your kitchen."

At this moment there was an interruption. There came a sweet little call from the outer darkness, and Minette loped into the room, a thin and shapely Minette, though now more cross-eyed with love than ever. She deposited a new-born kitten in the box that had been made ready at the side of the stove. She retired. She came back with another kitten, and another, and another.

Thirteen times she departed and returned, as they watched and counted, fascinated, and tears of joy flowed from the eyes of Monsieur Bonneval.

When the last one had been deposited and Minette started nursing, Monsieur Bonneval declared with deep feeling, " You said, Monsieur, that I might name my *poularde.* Very well. I name it *Poularde Surprise Treize Minets.*"

At this moment Brazon produced the *soufflé au curaçao* prepared from the recipe of Monsieur Bonneval, a dream, a vision, high, potent, sturdy, uncollapsible, a beige cloud, with the interior construction apparently of reinforced steel. They joined round the table, and with a Moët & Chandon '37 toasted the two stars of Monsieur Bonneval and the *Poularde Surprise Treize Minets.*

So, the next time you tour France and drop in at the Auberge Loiret to partake of Monsieur Bonneval's delectable " chicken à la thirteen kittens," do not, I beg of you, let on that I have given away his secret ingredient and the reason why he could not reveal it even for the honour and accolade of the third star.

It was simple, but a trifle unusual. As you have already suspected, for love of Minette he had seasoned the *poularde* liberally with that herb beloved of all felines, the strongly scented leaves of *nepeta cataria*, a plant better known to one and all as catmint.

★ ★ ★

HONOURABLE MENTION

The Duc de Morny was giving a ball. It was his custom as well as his pleasure, to dazzle his guests by the splendour of his entertainments . . . A few people wondered in whose honour all this was displayed, nearly always there was a special guest of the evening. When the dancing was at its height, some kind person whispered that Madame de X had disappeared. All knew that of late she had seemed to be the " chosen one." Where could she be?

Some minutes later, the ducal host was also missing—a few noticed this, but soon all was forgotten in the whirl of the waltz. Unfortunately, the music ceased for a while, the dancers were regaining their seats, leaving the middle of the ballroom empty.

Suddenly, the lady reappeared with a satisfied smile, quite unconscious that amongst her frills and laces, hung the collar of the *Légion d'Honneur*, which the Duc had worn around his neck.

A little later, the Duc made his appearance, dignified and quite unruffled, but minus the collar of the *Légion d'Honneur* . . .

The story was repeated with added details throughout the capital and the theme was of how easily and charmingly Madame de X had won the *Légion d'Honneur.*

BARONESS DE STOECKL & WILFRID S. EDWARDS,
When Men Had Time to Love

LADY FOR DROWNING

"By the way," said the young man, "this is my wife"

by ADRIAN ALINGTON

HAVE I ever seen a ghost? Well, pedantic as it may sound, the answer is that it depends on what you mean by ghost.

Certainly I have had a strange and alarming experience of—I hesitate to use the word "supernatural," because—you will see the reason, when I have finished my story. That is, if you really want me to tell it? I shall be glad to, because, to tell you the truth, my experience not only shook me at the time but still causes me considerable anxiety. I shall be happy to have your opinion—particularly yours, Professor. Anyhow, here is the story.

About two years ago, when I reached retiring age, I began to look about for a modest cottage somewhere in the country. It wasn't an easy job and I must have seen over dozens before a house-agent in Amhurst found me exactly what I wanted. Well Cottage, situated in a tiny village about two miles from the town.

There was nothing showy about Well Cottage. It was no period place, with oak beams and ingle-nooks, but it was roomy and unpretentious, two labourers' cottages knocked into one, and a previous owner had spent quite a lot of money on putting in modern conveniences. But what chiefly attracted me was the garden, which was larger than you would have expected, and full of fruit trees; in fact, the perfect place for me to potter about in, in my ineffectual amateur way.

The well itself was at the end of the garden. Long disused, of course, but it gave—or so I liked to think—an individual and picturesque touch to the place. It was pretty deep too. If you dropped a pebble into it, there was an appreciable interval before you heard a tiny splash from below.

It was still winter when I moved in, but I found the cottage warm and snug and, thanks to the Vicar, who had been a member of my own college, I had secured the services of an admirable village woman, Mrs. Hodges, who came in every day to see to my wants. Life moved smoothly. I read a good deal, explored the countryside, made friends with my neighbours who, though few, were congenial and welcoming, and waited for the spring.

Since I have told you that this is a kind of ghost story, you are, no doubt, waiting to hear that I presently became aware of "an indefinable sense of evil," pervading my cottage. Well, it is quite true that presently I did.

It was one evening in April, when the blossom was beginning to fall from my trees. It was growing dark, but I still sat on in the garden, for the day had been full of sunshine and the air was not yet chilly enough to drive me indoors.

My dog was with me in the garden that evening; in fact, it was he who first became aware of the "indefinable sense of evil." Quite suddenly his fur bristled, and he bared his teeth with every sign of fear and hatred.

I saw that he was staring fixedly in the direction of the well. I could see nothing myself to cause his alarm. I got up and walked down the garden. I called to him to follow, but he declined to budge.

I expect at some time or another you have played the childish game of looking for something and being "hot" and "cold." That's exactly how it was with me then. As I drew near the well, I became conscious of an extraordinary sense of fear and desolation, so real and concentrated that it was like some foul stench, emanating from the well itself. It was almost unendurable and I moved quickly away. As I left the well behind me, this horrible sensation faded. I was back in the peace of the April evening.

That was the beginning of the thing. My experience had been so intangible and fantastic that I was inclined to put it down to imagination. And then about three weeks later it happened again. But this time I saw what I am convinced that the dog had seen that first evening. I saw the Drowned Lady.

Once again it was dusk, and I saw her first merely as a shadowy figure among the trees. But the impression sharpened and became clear. I saw that her clothes were sodden and rotted with water. Her fair hair hung lank about her shoulders, and her eyes were fixed on me with a blind, drowned look, very dreadful to see. She was standing beside the well, and I was once again strongly aware of that sense of horror and unhappiness, surrounding her like an invisible fog.

How long this shocking apparition remained I have no idea. But when at last it vanished, the accompanying sense of evil went with it.

This time I was badly shaken, I admit. I went straight back into the house and mixed myself a strong whisky and soda. I was also, perhaps unreasonably, very angry. I felt that the house-agent in Amhurst should have warned me if, as seemed certain, there was some tragic secret in the history of Well

Cottage. But it is my nature to proceed cautiously and I decided, as a preliminary, to make a few inquiries locally. Who better for the purpose than my own Mrs. Hodges who had lived in the village all her life?

Next morning I began to question her casually about the former inhabitants of the cottage, and brought the conversation round to the well. I watched her closely as she answered. She was a guileless creature and I was soon convinced that, if there were indeed a dark secret, she knew nothing of it.

I tried the same tactics subsequently on the Vicar with the same result. I even pursued my inquiries at the village pub where the lifelong inhabitants congregated—I could not find a a clue. Once when I hinted at the possibility of the place being haunted, I met with ribald laughter.

But what was the secret of Well Cottage? I must confess that the problem began to have a kind of morbid fascination for me. How long had the well itself been in existence? The lady's clothes had been so ruined by immersion in the water that it was impossible even to guess at what period she had lived.

Then, a few evenings later, I saw the Drowned Lady again. It happened in just the same way, only it seemed that she stayed longer, and the suggestion of evil surrounding her seemed even stronger.

As far as I was concerned, that was the limit. Cowardly it might be, but I was not going to have my few peaceful years of retirement ruined by the ghost of a perfect stranger who had fallen or been thrown into the well. The very next morning I took the bus into Amhurst and went to see the house-agent. I told him that I had changed my mind about Well Cottage and wanted to be rid of it as soon as possible.

"Do you want to let or sell?" he asked, rather surprised.

"I'd rather sell but I'll let, if necessary. Frankly, I want to get out of the place."

"Any particular reason?"

"I don't like the atmosphere as much as I expected."

Quite clearly, he thought me eccentric, if nothing worse. But I was not taking the risk of being laughed at again as I had been in the pub, nor, more shamefully perhaps, of damping the enthusiasm of any prospective purchaser by telling my story.

A few days later a young man turned up with an order to view. He was not the type that I care for particularly—he seemed to me a flashy sort of fellow and a little furtive—but he appeared delighted with the cottage.

"Just the thing we are looking for," he said, when I had

shown him over. "If I may, I'll bring my wife to see it this afternoon. If she likes it as much as I do, we'll call it a deal."

I was waiting for them in the garden. I saw them come through the gate, the young man, the house-agent and—I stood staring stupidly at the little party, for in the centre walked the Drowned Lady. She was not as I had seen her previously; she was dry and alive and smiling, but there was no shadow of doubt that it was she. I should have recognized her anywhere.

"Here we are again," said the young man. "By the way, this is my wife."

She must have thought me extremely ill-mannered for I could not take my eyes off that familiar, yet strangely unfamiliar face. It seemed utterly unreal that she stood there, smiling at me in the June sunshine, and that I felt her hand warm in mine.

I sent the three of them indoors to look over the house. Meanwhile, I paced about the garden, feverishly trying to understand this new twist in the situation. When my brain began to clear slightly, I tried to recall the little I had read that might bear on the subject—*An Experiment with Time*, you know, and all that—but I was still in a state of bewildered indecision when the three came back.

"O.K.," said the young man. "Doreen loves it just as much as I do, don't you, darling?"

The girl nodded, looking radiantly happy. My mind made itself up with a click.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I've changed my mind. I cannot sell you the cottage, after all."

They all three stared at me. "But look here," the young man persisted, "we want it. If it's a question of the price—"

"It has nothing to do with the price. I am not willing to sell it to you. That is all there is to be said."

They saw at last that I was determined, and went away. No doubt the house-agent explained to them on the way back to Amhurst that I was quite mad.

A few weeks later I did sell Well Cottage to a retired army man. That, as I have said, was nearly two years ago and I have not been near the place since. But I have never been able to forget the Drowned Lady. You see, of course, the question that keeps nagging at my mind, Professor?

Exactly. Have I succeeded in saving the life of that unfortunate young woman, or have I not?

★ ★ ★

Intuition is reason in a hurry.

HOLBROOK JACKSON

★ **SCIENCE FICTION CHOICE**

This month's Science Fiction Choice is a first story by a Birmingham writer, already known to some readers from his broadcast talks.

LAST OF THE VIKINGS

by W. H. BOORE

CAPTAIN KIM, the old astronaut, stood on the bridge of the *Pegasus*, and gazed into the black skies of the great nothingness, where innumerable suns burnt steadily, and time itself was the slow exhausting of their fires. He always stood thus when re-entering the moon's orbit on his way back to earth. He felt he was again in his own backyard; where the sun was once more its proper size, and the constellations in shape and situation made up the old familiar pattern of the earth's night sky.

Here, where gravity was non-existent, the old ship held steadily on the course of her momentum, and there was no need for him on the bridge. His magnetic boots tinkled on the steel floor as he moved towards the door. He sighed wearily as he turned in the direction of the saloon and its distinguished occupants. They did not like him in there; and he did not like them. Still, he had never been afraid to face anyone, even politicians. He opened the door, and stepped through.

For a moment he stayed there, looking them over. There was Elmer K. Horus, President of Earth—that florid, pursy oval of a man whose dollars had bought him governments, and armed them to secure him dominion.

His secretary, a meek little Mercurian—now a naturalized Earthling—stood beside him and a little to the rear; Sarap knew his place to within half an inch. And Vance, like his master, of the earth, earthly; Vance, who was almost Elmer's other self; Vance, the whisperer, who so quietly performed what Elmer so loudly commanded.

"Hullo, Captain," said Elmer. "Where are we?"

"Within the moon's orbit, back again in the old familiar spaces."

"Home at last."

"Only about 200,000 miles to go," Kim answered. "The old familiar spaces hold no joy for me on this, my last return."

" You ought to be glad," said Elmer. " Glad, d'you hear? Back on Earth, where you can feel the pull of the old planet; where you can eat a meal and know where it is." He patted his belly. " Space," he said disgustedly, " space sags. It's like driving over a hump-backed bridge, but longer."

" You will be seated? " said Sarap, sliding a magnetic stool behind the Captain.

Kim shook his head: " I have no weight, and therefore no weariness."

" Sit down," Elmer barked. " Sit down and look natural."

" The President has spoken," insisted Vance softly, " and the President must be obeyed."

Kim shook his head. " I am Captain here," he said.

" Have it your own way." Elmer's bad temper splashed from him and hung, a cloud of droplets, in the air between them. " Have it your own way, but when I see you chaps floating upwards from your anchored feet like—like seaweed in a pool, it makes me dizzy."

" You will soon be home," said the Captain, " home, where your planet will stick to you like fly-paper."

A subtle wariness came into the eyes of the three passengers. A question gathered behind their glances. It was Vance who put it into words.

" Your use of the second person, my dear Captain, instead of the all-embracing first person plural suggests a certain personal reservation."

" Let there be no doubt about it, Captain, you come with us." The President paused and added, " You have no choice. Let me recapitulate the position."

" I know, I know," Kim answered. " I can quote the preamble to the Venusian peace treaty by heart: ' In order to maintain peace between the planets it is hereby decreed that all spaceships be withdrawn and broken up. Men may commune, but they may no longer meet.' "

" You are well informed," said Vance.

" It means that this ship, my ship, is the last of the spacefleet. We are on our way to the knacker's yard. No more shall I or any man traverse the infinities—we shall all stay on our own little bits of stardust; we'll live and die there, crawling about, slimy with gravity."

" But you forget," said Elmer, " that space travel, which has brought the planets so close together that they find cause to quarrel, is no longer necessary. You are old-fashioned, my friend—you and your screaming jets and your belching rockets—the crude, primitive, obsolescent relics of the space age."

" It is the planets that are primitive; jets and rockets are only needed to tear us from their clumsy embrace; once out here, you can forget them. Power means nothing when there is nothing to oppose."

" We shall still travel," the politician answered, " by radio, television, and teletaction—all men will be, in effect, in all places. I shall visit Venus at the touch of a knob, or Jupiter at the turn of a switch. We can travel in effect, but not in person. And, in effect, we shall be able to visit the non-viable places like Jupiter and the Sun itself. We are not restricting man's range; we are extending it. Every man on every planet will breathe only his own air, while he will experience all the worlds that ever shall be."

" I've heard your slogan: *Teletaction for All.* And the poor stay-at-home voters who have heard it overlook the fact that Elmer K. Horus has a pretty fair holding in the largest teletaction factory on earth."

Elmer waved a hand languidly.

"I have a hide like a spaceship, Captain," he said, "and, anyway, you cannot help yourself."

" Can't I? "

" I have taken precautions; your seditious ideas were not unknown to me. Vance and Sarap are skilled space operators. If you try any funny business, they can take charge."

Kim noticed that the two henchmen had moved between him and the door.

" You think that, do you? " he asked, and his voice was as soft with significance as the voice of Vance himself.

" Sure, these boys can land your ship for you."

" If," said Kim, " Your Excellency will just draw the curtains of the circular window, you may see something to interest you."

Elmer swept the heavy velvet away, and the four of them peered out.

There was a strange collection of jetsam moving with the ship, yet quite detached from it. Near the window was a mess of wet tea-leaves, where the crew had emptied their teapot; a worn sock, a saucepan with a hole in it, a lump of dirty water moving with them like a solid thing; several bacon-rinds; bones, potato-peelings, cigarette-ends; and, a little farther out, several massive cylinders, each about six feet long and about eighteen inches thick.

It was on these that the watchers gazed—Kim with satisfaction, the others with increasing horror. Sarap's face turned the peculiar mauve that is the Mercurian equivalent of earthly blenching. " My gods," he said, " the devil has jettisoned the fuel."

" What does that mean? " asked Elmer, who always liked to preserve his ignorance.

" It means," replied Vance, and his voice was still no more than a whisper, " that we have no fuel to brake our earthfall."

" Can't you get them back? They're not far away."

Vance shook his head.

" Now, listen to me," Kim interrupted. " Mr. President, you have said that space travel is old-fashioned. That there will be peace on the planets when people stay at home. That every man shall be, henceforth, a looker-on; a presser of buttons, and a picker-up of messages. Then you're wrong. Your Government will go the way of all tyrannies. New leaders will arise filled with the urge to adventure. The spacefleets will sail again."

" You and I shan't know that day—" Elmer began, " but what's the use of politics now? Can't you boys do something? " He looked at their hopeless faces, then turned again to Kim: " You're a space captain, you wouldn't break your code."

" It's a strange thing," said Kim, " that you politicians, when you can't use your power to threaten, use your opponent's honour to persuade. See that stuff out there? " he added.

Elmer nodded, and the Captain continued, " In space we are free, free even to be litter-fiends."

" What happens to that filth? " asked Vance.

" There is no filth in space. Even a politician smells sweet, in space—" he paused a moment—" All that stuff, including the fuel, will follow us until we use our brakes for a landing. Then it will all leave us, falling under the force of gravity until, like a falling star, it is burnt in the upper air of Earth by its own speed and friction."

He looked around the listening men. " And the same thing would happen to a falling spaceship—without its fuel."

Elmer licked his lips. Vance seemed amused; he had courage, that Earthling.

" Yes," said Kim in a soft, conversational voice, " as the vessel falls through the first air, it grows hotter and hotter with surprising swiftness; no one can survive such heat."

Kim floated easily from his feet. " If I save your lives, will you give me mine? "

" What do you want? " asked Elmer.

" In the tail of this craft is the lifeboat; I have already sent my crew there. That lifeboat has enough fuel aboard to land it on earth. I shall not break the astronaut's code—to care for my passengers, my crew, and my ship. Follow me." He led the way to the door, but suddenly turned about. " Your boots must be left here," he said. He waited while the discomforted

statesmen released themselves from the magnets. Then he led the way, and they followed.

As he walked he turned to the three helpless, wallowing creatures, and laughed as they cannoned and swam behind him. "Mine," he said sardonically, "is now the power; and the glory shall be."

"Mad," Vance muttered.

"For ever and ever," murmured Kim.

He stood aside as they clutched their way through the little door that led into the lifeboat, where the crew were already waiting. Kim seized in one hand the lever that would separate him from them for eternity. "When you are gone," said Kim, "I shall put *Pegasus* in a closed orbit around the earth. I shall open the air-cocks, until the atmosphere leaks away. And there, in the antiseptic emptiness of space, I shall remain without corruption and without end. You, in your short life, will watch me rise and set and wax and wane. I shall be eternally a monument to the forgotten ways of adventure."

Slowly he started to move the lever, and the heavy door began to close.

"I may be an old astronaut," said Kim with a smile, "but I shall be a very new star."

IN ARGOSY NEXT MONTH

SWEET THURSDAY
by JOHN STEINBECK

Chapters From His Brilliant Forthcoming Novel

DOUBLE TAKE

One familiar Club story concerns a peer and a peer-to-be. Though both are dead I had better be no more specific than that. The peer had many virtues (at any rate I am ready to believe he had) but no one ever called him genial. One day when the peer was sitting at lunch, with an empty seat beside him, the peer-to-be came bustling up and asked heartily, "Mind if I take this chair?" "No," replied the peer with some emphasis, "provided you take it away."

H. WILSON HARRIS, *Life So Far*

TALKING SHOP

Caveat emptor!

Just after they turned off the main road they came to the Suluman's shop. The Suluman was a large round Arab who was always dressed in a spotless white robe, like a nightgown, with a large red tarboosh, or fez, on his head, from which a black tassel swung to and fro. His face was a brick-red colour to match his fez; and he always lay outside his shop in a green silken hammock rocking himself with his toe which he pushed against the side of the verandah while he read a little pink book; it was Gamage's catalogue translated into Arabic!

His children, dozens of them, rolled, romped, played, and fought on the ground all round him, while his wives attended to the duties of the household and the shop. Nobody knew how many wives and children he had, unless he kept a note of them himself. He seldom got out of his hammock unless it was raining. But when he heard the car and the lorry approaching he bounced up and stood bowing and salaaming to the doctor and his family.

ROY CAMPBELL,
The Mamba's Precipice

Shop Window

I stood for a long while before the shop window
Looking at the blue butterflies embroidered on tawny silk.
The building was a tower before me,
Time was loud behind me,
Sun went over the housetops and dusty trees;
And there they were, glistening, brilliant, motionless,
Stitched in a golden sky
By yellow patient fingers long since turned to dust.

CONRAD AIKEN,
Improvisations: Lights and Snow

Delivery Service

Emma . . . then joined Harriet at the interesting counter, trying, with all the force of her own mind, to convince her that, if she wanted plain muslin, it was of no use to look at figured; and that a blue ribbon, be it ever so beautiful, would still never match her yellow pattern. At last it was all settled, even to the destination of the parcel.

"Should I send it to Mrs. Goddard's, ma'am?" asked Mrs. Ford.

"Yes—no—yes, to Mrs. Goddard's. Only my pattern gown is at Hartfield. No; you shall send it to Hartfield, if you please. But then, Mrs. Goddard will want to see it. And I could take the pattern gown home any day. But I shall want the ribbon. You could make it into two parcels, Mrs. Ford, could not you?"

"It is not worth while, Harriet, to give Mrs. Ford the trouble of two parcels."

"No more it is."

"No trouble in the world, ma'am," said the obliging Mrs. Ford.

"Oh, but indeed I would much rather have it only in one. Then, if you please, you shall send it all to Mrs. Goddard's. I do not know—No, I think, Miss Woodhouse, I may just as well have it sent to Hartfield, and take it home with me at night. What do you advise?"

"That you do not give another half-second to the subject. To Hartfield, if you please, Mrs. Ford."

"Ay, that will be much the best," said Harriet, quite satisfied; "I should not at all like to have it sent to Mrs. Goddard's."

JANE AUSTEN, *Emma*

Shopping Spree

Miss Flora McFlimsey, of Madison Square,
Has made three separate journeys to Paris;
And her father assures me, each time she was there,
That she and her friend Mrs. Harris . .
Spent six consecutive weeks without stopping,
In one continuous round of shopping;
Shopping alone, and shopping together,
At all hours of the day, and in all sorts of weather:
For all manner of things that a woman can put
On the crown of her head or the sole of her foot,
Or wrap round her shoulders, or fit round her waist . . .
In short, for all things that could ever be thought of,
Or milliner, modiste, or tradesman be bought of,
From ten-thousand-francs robes to twenty-sous frills;
In all quarters of Paris, and to every store:
While McFlimsey in vain stormed, scolded, and swore.
They footed the streets, and he footed the bills

WILLIAM ALLEN BUTLER,
Nothing to Wear

Housewife's Choice

Mrs. Heccomb always shopped from ten-thirty to midday, with a break for coffee at the Corona Café. If she was not " in town " by ten-thirty, she fretted. With her hive-shaped basket under her elbow, Portia in her wake, she punted happily, slowly up and down the High Street, crossing at random, quite often going back on her tracks.

Women who shop by telephone do not know what the pleasures of buying are. Rich women live at such a distance from life that very often they never see their money—the Queen, they say, for instance, never carries a purse. But Mrs. Heccomb's unstitched morocco purse, with the tarnished silver corners, was always in evidence.

She paid cash almost everywhere, partly because she had found that something happens to bills, making them always larger than you think, partly because her roving disposition made her hate to be tied to one set of shops.

She liked to be *known* in as many shops as possible, to receive a personal smile when she came in. And she had by this time managed things so well that she was known in every Seale shop of standing. Where she had not actually bought things, she had repeatedly priced them. She did admit herself tied to one butcher, one dairy because they *sent*: Mrs. Heccomb did not care for carrying meat, and the milk supply for a household must be automatic.

Even to these two shops she was not wholly faithful: she had been known to pick up a kidney here and there, some new shade of butter, a crock of cream.

ELIZABETH BOWEN,
The Death of the Heart

Cost of Living

Oh where is now that goodly golden time,
When gold was counted but a needfull drosse . . .
When one might haue a hundred egges a groate,
And for three halfepence, halfe a strike of Rye,
And for a shilling make himselfe a coate,
To keepe him warme, & many a Winter dry:
And for a farthing, a good pudding pie,
A good olde drawing Iade for halfe a crowne,
And forty pence the best Cow in a towne?

NICHOLAS BRETON, *Olde Mad-cappes new Gally-mawfrey*, 1602

O STAY AND HEAR

The little tale had an element of pure, unexpected romance

by P. SHAND ALLFREY

THEY are walking in the flower-garden, and what are they singing? Something rather merry and mocking; the veering breeze blows up a few words now and then to the ears of a lady behind green bathroom blinds. Now the lady raises a long pale arm and applies a little soap to it, at the same time peeping through the slats without rising from her cool bath-water.

Samedi après-midi,
Madame-là tombait malade:
Voyez, cherchait l'Abbé . . .

The brown girls' arms are intertwined like snakes; yet somehow the plump hand of Melta, who is a maid by profession and fond of arranging flowers, reaches out with a sharp carving-knife and lops off half a bush of crimson roses between one stanza and another; both girls dip in a flying curtsy, and the thinner fingers of Ariadne, eighteen-year-old cook, brush grass and come up with the dazzling spray.

Monsieur l'Abbé venait.
Il dit, Rome Saeculorum.
Madame-là comprend c'est "rhum."

But I thought they said the patois was *common* and that they disdained it, says this English Madame-là to herself, standing on a rush mat and dabbing off rivulets absently. To think of me, me myself, indulging in a cold bath at four o'clock in the afternoon! she comments inwardly.

When she told them about the sudden dinner, they had taken it very sweetly. "A business friend of the Master's." "Oh yes, Mistress: understood." "He is a Director, but has quite a simple appetite." "Flying fish," says Ariadne. "And fried plaintains," adds Melta.

"Oh no, I think not fried plaintains—too hot. Something green. Perhaps a little stuffed avocado?" "Stuffed with what, Mistress?" asks Ariadne bluntly. "Oh, I don't know . . . perhaps some parsley?" "The hen and the weeding boy have taken the parsley," Melta says. "Then I leave it to you."

They are pleased: they like things being left to them. They

take up the carving-knife and go out into the garden. But instead of hunting for a last blade of parsley or a handful of chives, they dance around in the high soft breeze, lopping off roses. Their aprons lift and swirl, and they look like ballet dancers dressed as probationer nurses: the full skirts of their uniforms are covered with a flight of multicoloured wild ducks. Their little song has come to an end, so they begin it again:

Samedi après-midi,
Madame-là tombait malade . . .

It is Saturday afternoon; and if I had fainted in my bath I could have drowned, I could have died, and those girls wouldn't have been in the least concerned, thinks Madame-là anxiously. She is envious of them, because they have each other for gay company. Now they are advancing on the lonely house, using their bouquet to shoo before them a brown hen with well-clipped wings. This is the pullet which had the temerity, in the middle of a sweltering West Indian summer, to lay one egg in a secret place and hatch out a solitary cream-coloured chicken.

The girls drive the hen, the hen cups the chick with her shortened wings, all rush in a giggling, clucking posse towards the kitchen steps, under which the hen and chicken disappear. Something about the hen and chick has a secret power of mirth over the girls: they sit on the bottom step, laps full of roses and arms round each other's necks, laughing fecklessly.

Madame-là has her own method of attracting attention: she leans out of the window with a small brass bell suspended on a string, and tinkles it above the white-capped heads.

"Melta! Ariadne! Don't forget Mr. Whitborough is coming to dinner!"

"Yes, Mistress," says Melta in her deep, harsh contralto. "We forget ourselves. The hen makes us laugh."

But they are speaking to an empty window: Madame-là has slipped downstairs to greet them on the landing. She wants to know what there is about the hen . . .

About the hen? Ariadne starts to laugh again. It is really intolerable. At last Melta says: "It is the hen and her child."

"The hen and her child is like ourselves," says Ariadne, rising to full copper height.

Melta is engaged in slicing off the rose stems, for all the world as if she is going to stuff Mr. Whitborough's avocado pears with the trimmings. Madame-là notices how pretty both girls are, and that Ariadne is the one with the crisp, scornful upper lip.

"She takes pride in her chick, which is of a lighter complexion than herself," volunteers Melta.

"Just as we do," says Ariadne. They both laugh again, to

see the amazement and appeal on Madame-là's face. It is giving them great pleasure to satisfy her curiosity tormentingly, bit by bit.

" I have a daughter, of very pale coloration," says Ariadne. " It is a girl. She is name Dolores."

" I also have a child, a boy name Ah-but-not. He is even so light as Adné's child, and born in the same month," says Melta.

" And how old are these children? " asks Madame-là, sounding lost. When she says the word " children " she looks wonderingly at their continuing childish arabesque against a background of roses.

" Two years at Epiphany," says Melta, and Ariadne echoes, " E-pi-phan-y."

" But where are they? "

" Where? " ask the girls together, astonished. " With our mothers in the country, Mistress, naturally."

Ariadne declares, " We were raised up as neighbours. We do everything together."

Madame-là makes an effort, and collects herself. " You must bring the children to see me."

" Yes, Mistress." They undulate evasively.

" But don't forget the dinner. Perhaps I could arrange the roses, to save time? "

Melta lays down the stems reproachfully. To create a diversion, Ariadne exclaims with cunning: " I can hear the Master's step, Mistress."

So Madame-là goes back upstairs and finds that Rodney indeed stands, steaming with recent energetic action, on the upstairs verandah. A strange redness overlays his sun-browned face. " Have you been playing tennis? " she asks him.

" No, darling," says Rodney, turning his back to reveal that his shirt is torn to shreds. " I've been fighting."

All her life she has been wanting Rodney to be successful and masterful, and now she is not sure that success really suits him. Is he, after all, getting *too tough*?

" With the skipper of the *Douce Hélène*," he answers her question tersely.

" Oh Rodney! That poor black man! "

" He nearly made me two thousand pounds poorer, by tipping our new engine into the sea. I had practically to stun him to get it eased back into the boat until we could land it."

She is silent, envisaging the horrid scene, a large lump of angled steel perilously rocking, and Rodney springing at the skipper's gleaming torso. But Rodney appears unconcerned: he removes his shredded shirt and makes for the bathroom.

To soothe him further, she calls through the netted swing door: "I have a theory about the social aspects of—"

But Rodney calls back: "Oh lord, no theories! Not with Whitborough coming to dinner!"

She is hurt, because really her theory is quite delicate and distinguished. She believes now that people in this tropical island do not make love for romantic reasons, but as social and evolutionary means. She is thinking of Melta and Ariadne and their children of light coloration, and the hen and the chick; it all seems to link up.

Fastening her pearls above the surf-green voile, she sighs, and then she begins to hum the catchy little song the girls were singing in the garden; going downstairs a moment later to see how Mr. Whitborough's dinner is progressing.

If there is any dinner at all, it must be incarcerated in the frightening iron oven. Even the open coal-pot has disappeared. So have the girls.

Madame-là runs back upstairs in distress. "Rodney! I can't find the maids—and the coal-pot has gone, too." She hunts for her little brass bell.

"Don't worry," he says. "They are probably ironing out each other's hair with flat-irons. They always do before a dinner-party. Look out of the back window and you'll see them at it."

He is quite right. Ariadne is stretched on a piece of sacking outside the maids' room; Melta is applying a sizzling iron to her short, crimped hair, pulling as she presses. It is a painful scene, like an operation, and is transforming the girl into a sophisticated Arawak.

"And I can't think," cries Madame-là, "why they should want to have hair as straight as ours, when they *mock* at us so!"

Rodney laughs. He goes to a cabinet and pours out two long frosted drinks, to fortify them against their guest.

Yet, after all, the evening turns out smooth and gracious. Mr. Whitborough does most of the talking; as Rodney has hinted, he is a man of theories. He is a much-travelled man, and makes a good story of how he found an almost untarnished button of his glorious regiment on a high slope in the Himalayas. Once, too, he entered an African chieftain's hut and was surprised to see the pennant of his yacht club fluttering above a four-poster.

"Fluttering?" Madame-là cannot resist exclaiming, thinking of the draught on the dying chieftain—she having imagined African huts as windowless as igloos . . .

"But not the least charming of my adventures," says Mr. Whitborough, over the crimson roses—he is quite handsome for

his age, and his quivering nostrils seem to devour the flying fish before he lifts his fork . . . After all, the dinner is superb, though it seems to have been cooked in ten minutes, and the mysterious stuffing which inflates the yellow-green avocado pears must always remain a secret—". . . when I visited this island once, not so awfully long ago. My friend Arbuthnot and I went up the Rivière Fantasque: he was trying to net rare birds for his tropical aviary, and I was after edible crabs. We sat there on the river bank, enjoying the scene and contemplating a plunge, when suddenly—" The memory is so sweet, so incomparable, that Mr. Whitborough's nostrils meet his upper lip in an unusual smile.

"Suddenly there was this voice, coming from the depths of what I can only describe as a jungle; and we saw that higher up the river two comely girls, clothed only in a series of patches, were beating some cloth against a rock in the water and singing. At least, one of them was singing: and I am sure you will never guess what the words were."

"A song about a sick lady on Saturday afternoon," Madame-là puts forward, startling Rodney by her sudden vivacity. She has taken advantage of Melta's absence with the emptied plates: but she knows, she is positive that behind the glazed screen two interlinked forms are panting against each other with suppressed giggles.

Mr. Whitborough stares at Madame-là in astonishment.

"And how the Abbé was called in—" she starts to explain.

"Oh no!" Mr. Whitborough states firmly, authoritatively. "Nothing as ribald as that. Something very strange, almost, one might say, moving. A Shakespearian song to an Elizabethan air. We distinctly heard it: *O stay and hear, your true love's coming* . . . and the other voice took it up: *That can sing both high and low.* I remember how it echoed down the valley. *Both high and low.* It quite put poor Arbuthnot off his game. He dropped the net, and three rare specimens escaped."

"That's a beautiful tale, Whitborough—one of your best," says Rodney.

"And the most beautiful thing is that it's quite true," says Mr. Whitborough.

"*I* believe it," says Madame-là, sparkling.

"But surely that's not the end of it?" says Rodney.

"Ah, my dear fellow," says Mr. Whitborough, "I have learnt by long experience as a raconteur that there is a point at which one ends a story. That little tale has an element of pure, unexpected romance. To carry it further would be crude. Since you press me, Arbuthnot went up the river, after his birds or after the girls—I don't know which."

" And did you ever find any edible crabs? " asks Madame-là, borrowing an inflection of mockery from somewhere. She does not expect Mr. Whitborough to reply; besides, Melta has just come in with a crystal bowl full of fruit jelly. The night is so hot that the bright, rainbow-coloured mound wobbles dangerously, on the brink of disintegration.

It looks as if it is shaking—shaking with secret laughter.

* * *

THE PLEASURE OF YOUR COMPANY

Follow this social round and you may become dizzy, but you won't find it dull. We invite you to attend the following functions—and you score one point for recognizing the occasion, too.
Score another point for the author and one for the source, making a total of twenty-four in all.

The answers are on page 101.

1. *It takes some time to get into the church—such a long-winded old salt by the door.*

2. *There's more than the wind on this heath, but some people will go anywhere for the pictures, even if they're only in the fire.*

3. *Until the meal was over, everything seemed normal. But afterwards, in the wood . . . was it just Midsummer Eve, or the fault of the stars?*

4. *A card game this time, in the south of France. And if you stay long enough, there'll be foie gras, fried potatoes, éclairs, cream, and jam.*

5. *Slower, PLEASE! You're a regular road hog—or perhaps road frog is nearer the mark.*

6. *Now for some refreshment, and perhaps the squire will sing. I loves that bekeays he never gives us nothing that's low.*

7. *Don't dress for this gipsy party—just a large bonnet and a little basket for the fruit. Delicious, except for the stooping and the sun!*

8. *This'll throw the conventional horseman into eight fits! Remember to bring your thimbles, your forks, and your soap.*

★ ★ ★

When you have read this copy of ARGOSY why not pass it on to a member of H.M. Forces?

TANGIER REVENGE

Driving recklessly, he saw the big headlamps creeping up on him

by JOHN KRUSE

"TAKE your bag, sair?"

"Cab, señor?"

"Hôtel Rif, monsieur?"

Larry Villiers gripped his case, thrust with his bony shoulder towards the door of the Customs shed, and stepped out into the clean white sunlight of Tangier. He did not look at the houses stretched around the bay, brighter than new sugar-loaves. He had seen from on deck how big the town had grown and he did not want to look at it. He stooped into a cab. It moved away with a sound like a finger-nail on velvet.

"Hotel Rosa Linda," Larry said. All the names were very clear in his mind still. He had thought about them every night in his cell. The Rosa Linda was on the edge of town, and cheap.

As the town thickened about them Larry felt the apathy go out of him. He was back. There was no gladness, only excitement, like a cold draught inside him. He scanned the pavements. The same cosmopolitan crowds—business men, hucksters, adventurers of every race—living in a free port, the merchandise of the world at their fingertips, internationally governed and permanently neutral. The set-up of set-ups. Unique.

The cab rocked to a halt. The driver got out.

"This isn't it," Larry said.

They were at the intersection of two wide thoroughfares. The city stretched away in every direction.

"Yes, sair," the driver said.

Larry looked up at the ten-storey building. The neon sign read: Hotel Rosa Linda. He got out slowly, paid the man off, and stood on the kerb, a tall dark-eyed man in a quiet suit. He looked up at the modern façade, remembering a small hotel with geraniums . . . the distant sound of goat-bells wrinkling the air.

Five years! The realization of what that period meant came as a shock to him. He had convinced himself it had only seemed long, but now it confronted him—a lifetime.

He turned down the nearest side street, and found himself a shakedown offering full pension for 75 pesetas.

It was half past twelve. He wanted a drink. The thing he had come three thousand miles to do could wait. Right now, more than anything, he needed to take a drink in a part of the town that he knew, to see a familiar face—a waiter, a beggar, anyone. A glance of recognition would bring him to life.

He walked up through the town and across the old market-place and down into the Kasbah. The cupboard shops were just closing up for siesta. Shutters crashed about him as he passed down the rue Siaghias, the Petit Socco was almost empty, but at least the cafés were open.

He sat down outside the Central Bar and ordered coffee-anis. In the café opposite, a few disreputables browsed over their liquid lunches—marihuana peddlers, probably, waiting for clients. It was picturesque if you liked that sort of thing. Tourists came here to gape, writers to observe, painters to paint. Larry was not a tourist, nor a writer, nor a painter.

The sun smote down between the buildings. A tall, ugly man, wearing horn-rimmed spectacles and a dove-grey suit, its jacket fastened low over his belly, came out of the rue Siaghias, fanning himself with his hat. He stepped up under the awning of the Central Bar.

Larry rose in a single movement and barred his way. The bottle-thick lenses inspected him, blank with reflected light.

" Lar-ry! What do you do here? I thought—"

" Just came back on a trip, Ferdie," Larry said carefully. He gripped the German's elbow affectionately. The sleeve under his fingers felt like silk. " You look great. How's Netta? Still got the garage? "

" Yes. Everyone's well. How have *you* been, Larry? We worried about you a lot."

" Yeah. Yeah, sure. It was all right."

The older man looked at him, his face concerned. Then another expression came into his eyes. It was embarrassment. He glanced around. " Come on inside, Larry. What will you drink? "

" Dutch beer." Larry followed him in.

Ferdie Mencken clapped his hands and ordered. The American smiled, shaking his head. " Of all people! I was going to look you up. Tell me, Ferdie, how's it been here? I hardly recognized the place."

Ferdie sighed. " Oh, you know. It just goes on and on developing. It makes me frightened. Money pours in all the time—gold. And this is only the beginning."

" But that's what you want, isn't it? "

" Oh yes. It's very nice for business."

There was a silence. The German fidgeted; glanced around. Larry leaned forward suddenly. "Listen, Ferdie. I never really thanked you. It was damn good of you to buy the garage off me to help pay for my defence. I—"

"No, no!" The German wouldn't look at him. He waved his hands. "No, please!"

"I knew you didn't want it; but you insisted. It was a pretty decent thing to do."

"Dear boy, don't thank me. I did very well. I got it cheap. And anyway, the defence was no good." He looked around, then drew in his breath, and stood up. "I must go. Drop in at my office before you leave. We'll talk about it."

Larry stared at him. "But—"

Ferdie adjusted his hat meticulously. "But what?"

Larry's mouth slowly hardened. "Nothing. I—I thought if you were going up past the garage we might go together. I'd like to have a look at the old place."

Mencken hesitated. "I can go that way." He paid for the drinks.

The two of them went out into the heat and down through the old city. It was the exit cue, Larry realized. He would have expected it from anybody else, but Ferdie knew him well enough to realize he would never have pulled a dirty job like that. Scared of his reputation, Larry thought. In Tangier, business came first. Friendship, they thought, was something to do with the Navy.

In the avenue d'Espagne they caught a cab and drove without talking up into the new town. The cab stopped on a circular intersection in the heart of the city.

Larry looked out at the garage without recognizing it. The one he had built had stood on the outskirts of town—a go-ahead little affair, painted green, with a showroom added when he had landed the contract as sole distributor for a new German family car. But this edifice occupied a whole block; neon quivered under the scalloped awning.

"I altered it a little," Ferdie said.

Larry stared. The building did nothing to him. New and unrecognizable models of the German car gleamed in echelon behind plate glass.

"Come along," Ferdie said. "The manager can show you round."

He led Larry in. Cars were standing on hydraulic lifts along either wall, their undersides flood-lit for servicing. Larry counted fifteen mechanics. Ferdie was talking to someone, shouting above the din. "This is Mr. Cleaver," he said.

Larry hardly saw the man. He was looking at something else—something under a tarpaulin. It was low and wide and about sixteen feet long. Suddenly he disengaged his hand; crossed over and ripped the tarpaulin back.

His old green Mercedes! The low prow, the swept fenders, the big Bosch headlamps, the glistening outside manifolds—Larry reached out and touched it wonderingly. She had been cared for. The bonnet-straps had been renewed. Two brand-new spares stood back half a yard off the rear trunk. She was the last of the 540K's—one of the most beautiful cars in the world. He curled his fingers round the corded steering-wheel, felt the upholstery. Externally she was sound.

He turned. The German and the manager were watching him.

"You didn't tell me." It was an accusation.

"Clean forgot about it, Larry," Ferdie said, making a show of looking at his watch.

"But—does she go?"

Ferdie shrugged. "Ask Cleaver. I'm off." He moved towards the entrance.

"Wait—" Larry snapped. Ferdie paused without looking round—"If she goes, I'll hire her off you."

"Yes, yes. Take her. Cleaver, see to it!" He hurried out.

Larry followed him with his eyes. Anything to get away. He turned to the manager.

"She'll go," Cleaver said distastefully. He was small and thin, with eyes like rivets and the sort of mouth you get from tight shoes. "If you're serious. Personally, if that was the last car on earth, I'd walk. Took her out once. Just once. The clutch nigh breaks your neck. You need a winch to get her round corners. We just keep her for show. But she'll go."

"What does she need?"

"Drain and refill. Battery. About fifty gallons of petrol to get you from here to the door."

Larry smiled. "Lend me some overalls. I'll do it myself!"

Two hours later he had the Mercedes started. Its cavernous roar filled the workshops. He brought her up to peak revs, held her there, let her die away to a slow, shuddering tickover.

Cleaver screwed his finger in his ear.

"She'll do."

Larry packed the tools away. "I'll have her back for you by Friday."

The manager gave him a hard, cynical look. "What is this anyway, Remembrance Week?"

So you know, Larry thought. He shut down the bonnet. "Something like that."

He settled himself in; put the car in gear.

" Well, don't go ramming any cops," Cleaver said.

Larry was halfway down the garage before the remark struck home. His foot hovered over the brake. He ironed out the temptation. The next moment sunlight broke over the car, the exhaust note flattened out, and he was hauling about two and a half yards of louvered bonnet around the intersection. He took the emptiest of the avenues and roared angrily away.

To hell with Cleaver. He had been warned off guys like him by the Governor when he came out. " You only harm yourself, hitting back at them," McFarlane had said. Well, he had more important things to do. He had it all mapped out—You didn't lie figuring every night for five years without arriving at some conclusions. The garages came first. He had a list of them in his head.

Someone had got a rotor-arm from somewhere, he knew, or they would never have been able to drive the Merc away from in front of the flat that night. He had had the key and the rotor upstairs with him. A kid could start a car without a key, but without a rotor it was different. You either had to adapt another one to fit—in which case you needed access to the car—or you ordered one from Germany. No one had had access to the car.

In one of the garages somewhere, he guessed, there was the record of such an order; and against it was the name of the guy who had framed him.

Larry had come home that night five years ago about one. He had left the car outside as usual and gone up to bed. The first intimation he had had that anything was wrong had been a thundering on his door at seven. When he opened it, three International Police officers had pushed past him, and looked in all the rooms. Larry had followed them angrily. In the doorway of the sitting-room he had stopped. Scattered all over the floor, some of the envelopes torn open, were the contents of three air-mail bags.

The first thing that leapt to his mind was that someone had come up the fire-escape and got rid of the bags through the first open window they saw. But the police wouldn't listen. He guessed, then, that there must be a whole lot more to it than that, and at his interrogation down at Headquarters he had learnt just how much more.

His car had been used. Everyone in Tangier knew the green Mercedes, and it had left a trail of witnesses all along the route. It had been seen on the road to the airport, and again at the airport, where at 2 a.m. a man who could have been Larry had

knocked out a night-watchman and broken into the mail shed. Finally the car had been identified by the two motor-cycle cops who had intercepted it on its way back to town. The car had driven straight through them, smashing their machines and injuring them both.

By the time the police had arrived, the car was back where Larry had left it—outside the flat—still minus its key and rotor-arm, both of which were found by the police in Larry's pocket.

The argument put up by Larry's defence counsel, that he was solvent and had no motive for such a theft, was made to look pretty weak by the prosecution in the face of so much circumstantial evidence. There had been no loop-holes. The frame-up was complete. He had been found guilty and shipped back to the States to serve sentence.

Larry stepped on the accelerator. The ring-and-star radiator-cap raked across the buildings like a gunsight, fixed on garage number one, leapt forward. He killed the motor and went in.

He saw seven garages in two hours. Four of them let him in, but the entry he was seeking was not in their books. He looked at his watch: five o'clock. He had two more to try.

The first had been taken over by a new company. They let him see their storeman, a fat Spaniard, with skin like greasy lemon-peel. He had the old books somewhere, he said, staring at Larry with eyes that wouldn't have flickered if his suit had been on fire. Larry produced a dollar. The books were found.

Larry went through the columns, while the Spaniard watched him, a pencil-thin cigar unlighted between his teeth. Larry worked back from the date of his arrest. One month. Two. Under the third month there was an entry which read: *Rotor-arm, Mercedes; Model* 540*K; Code Number* . . . Written in the " For Whom " column was the name *Lamb, A. F.*

Larry's heart began to do queer things inside his chest. He bent forward and rested his head on his fists.

The Spaniard removed his cigar. " Hey—you all right? "

Larry nodded; leaned back weakly. He could feel his pulse racing and missing. Presently it passed off. He focused his eyes again on the entry. A. F. Lamb. The name was familiar, but he couldn't place it.

He pointed it out to the storeman; the Spaniard shook his head. The dapper little manager in the outer office shrugged. The entry was before his time.

" Well, thanks, anyway." Larry shook him by the hand. He stood outside in the sunlight, dazed. It had worked. About five years late, his luck was beginning to kick itself awake.

He drove round to the post office. Shutting himself in a phone-box, he looked up the name in the directory. He found it right away. "Lamb, Alger F."

Alger! Of course he knew him! A third-rate ex-actor from Hollywood, a big, soft guy, always on the scrounge for a free drink. Alger .... So he was the one.

He looked at the address. *Montagne.* The "Mountain" was Tangier's Nob Hill. Alger seemed to be doing all right for himself; that might be a lead in itself.

Larry shut the book with a snap. He had found a focal point for his bitterness at last. It welled up inside him, scalding his chest, his throat. He couldn't get out to the car fast enough.

Five minutes later, several kilometres out of town, Larry slowed down sufficiently to decipher the name Castel Ferit from amongst the finger-shadow of laburnum on a big white gateway. He swung in under the arch.

He had no set plan; he just wanted to see Alger Lamb—to startle him. The plan would come later, when he had assessed the man's reaction.

As he rounded an S-shaped carriageway with a view of the Atlantic through the trees, a self-consciously Spanish-looking house played hide-and-seek with him for a while behind the oleander; suddenly stepped out into the open. Under the vine-hung verandah, upwards of a dozen people stood around half as many shooting-brakes. The men all had guns; the women trailed shooting-sticks. Someone was out in front of them on the gravel, taking a cine-film.

The eyes of the party turned towards the Mercedes as it slowed up alongside. The man with the camera glanced over his shoulder. He straightened slowly and turned. He was big and as self-conscious as the house. Looking at the black flop of hair trained out over the forehead, the straight nose and woman's mouth, the big soft jaw, Larry recognized Alger Lamb.

Alger, in turn, recognized him. He stood absolutely still and stared; followed him round with his eyes as he parked the car in an angle of the house. Larry got out and came round to him. He took a firm grip on himself, unclenched his fingers, and drew a deep breath so his voice should sound steady. "Hullo, Alger," he said.

The man's eyes flickered. "Why, hullo, there," he said flatly. He didn't come forward.

Larry took in the rest of the shooting-party in a sidelong glance. A willowy silver-blonde with lips like painted sausages waved her shooting-stick at him. "Don't know who you are,"

she called out, " but you're just in time for a drink. Who's coming? "

There was a general movement towards the steps. Alger stayed where he was. " I thought—" he began, and changed his mind. " What are you doing back? "

" Just in on a short trip, Alger. I'm looking up a few old friends."

" Oh." There was a note of puzzlement in the voice. " Good of you to drop in."

" You've got yourself quite a place here."

" Pretty decent." He paused. " Been back long? "

" Not long."

" Just staying a few days, I suppose? " By the slight hardening of his voice, Larry knew that Alger was gaining in confidence. In another moment he would become hostile. Larry made a move towards the house. " That's right," he said. " I mustn't keep you from your guests."

" Look here, Villiers. Don't you think—"

" Alger! " the silver-blonde called out. " Lover, don't you think you ought to go in and keep an eye on Mohammed? You know what a perfectly beastly mess he makes of the drinks. We'll look after your boy-friend."

Larry had reached the steps. He started up them.

" Come up and meet the crowd." She slipped her arm through his, and led him along the verandah.

Alger stood glaring at Larry's back for a moment; then he turned suddenly and went into the house.

Out of the corner of his eye, Larry saw him go. The blonde nudged him along with her breast. There was a strong smell of perfume and Egyptian cigarettes. The people he shook hands with all seemed to have broken wrists; their conversation was like the chitter of teacups. Larry was strung tight as a catapult. He would give Alger two minutes.

When the time was up, Larry threaded his way to the main door and stepped into a low, long hallway, furnished with what looked like loot from a Spanish cathedral. An illuminated display tank stood on a pedestal in the centre, brilliant with tropical fish. Alger's voice was coming from somewhere—from under the stairs, it sounded like.

" Well, where is he? It's urgent, I tell you! What? Why don't you know? Oh, all right! " A receiver slammed down.

Larry cursed. He had mistimed it. The actor's crêpe soles sounded along the hall; when he saw Larry, he started.

" I was just admiring your fish," Larry said.

" Oh yes? " Alger's eyes met his for an instant; leapt away.

He was on the defensive. " Fun, aren't they? " He fidgeted about; then seemed to come to a decision. " If you're so interested in fish, I might show you something."

" Do."

" Through here."

Larry followed him through a drawing-room muted with brocade. He watched the balance of the big, conceited back warily. Alger might feel desperate enough to try and jump him. His type did nothing till they were cornered, and then quite suddenly, blindly, they would do anything.

But Alger went on through a sun-room and into what had once been a large glass conservatory. Now only the faintest rumour of daylight penetrated the blacked-out panes. The sole source of light was the score of big fish-tanks which lined the sides of the domed enclosure.

" My collection." Alger turned towards him, and raised his voice as though he were trying to keep it steady: " Look here, Villiers. I took you in here to get something straight. I don't like people pushing their way into my house and mixing with my friends. Particularly you. You can either leave now, of your own volition, or I can have you thrown out. Which is it to be? "

Larry was wandering down the tanks. " What do you call this? "

" Synanceia. It's poisonous. Did you hear what I said? "

" Looks a bit like you, Alger. Without the hair, of course, and wearing chain mail." Larry tapped the glass thoughtfully. " Talking of mail, by the way—how is the frame-up business these days? "

Alger's eyes flared wide for an instant; then they became unseeing, unreasoning. The lips spread spitefully, their insides gleaming wetly. He took a lunging step forward. Now, Larry thought, balling his fist. Now—

A voice broke through on them suddenly from the direction of the drawing-room: " No, don't bother, Dorothy. I'll find him myself. Alger! "

Footsteps pounded across a wood floor. Alger turned and moved with remarkable swiftness to intercept his visitor. Larry heard the far door of the sun-room open.

" Alger! " the voice said, now tensely suppressed. " Where have you been? I have been trying to contact you all afternoon. Villiers is back! He's here, in—" The voice suddenly stopped. Larry could almost see Alger waggling his hands and pushing his visitor back into the other room. The door slammed behind them, and there was silence.

Larry stood quite still, paralysed with amazement. Fresh

ramifications formed, and spread like water-rings from a flung stone; solutions revolved in the ashen gloom, unreal, improbable as the fish. *Alger's visitor was Ferdie.*

Suddenly he knew he had learnt something very important. To stay now would be useless and dangerous. He stepped lightly through into the sun-room and let himself out by the sliding doors into the garden. He went round and got into the Mercedes. It was masked by the other cars, which was probably, he thought, why Ferdie hadn't seen it.

He drove past the house without looking up at the verandah. Someone called out, but he headed on down the drive. Let 'em yell, he thought grimly—the whole glass menagerie.

He waited at the foot of the mountain to see if anyone would follow. No one did. He drove thoughtfully back to town. Ferdie's complicity had clarified the issue. Something like a pattern was beginning to emerge. What he wanted now was evidence.

The lights were coming on in the blueness. He drove slowly past the shops. With sudden inspiration, he stopped and bought a can of treacle and a torch. Then he drove to a small garage and parked the car. He wasn't going to be caught again leaving it on the street.

At midnight he picked up the car. The lights of Tangier were dying on the avenues. The ocean smelt big and close. Larry drove round to a certain part of the town and parked in a darkened cul-de-sac. Gathering up his purchases, he walked back along the street. He stood in the shadows for a while, sizing up the big building across the street.

The rear part of Ferdie's garage was in darkness; but from the intersection a halation of coloured neon showed that the front end was still alive. Petrol only, he guessed. One attendant, at most two. He waited till the street was quiet; then slipped across, and entered the alley at the back of the garage.

There was just one window, an eighteen-inch square of frosted glass, well above his head. It was shut. Uneasily, he went back to the Mercedes. It was risky, but it was the only way. He brought the car round and parked it close in against the wall.

Larry spread a newspaper on the ground and smeared it over with the treacle. Then, after a quick look along the thoroughfare, he got up onto the car and spread the sticky paper over the window. He was in full view of anyone passing the alley.

He broke the glass gently with his fist and stripped off the paper. The glass came away stuck to the treacle. There had only been a dull thump. He reached in and undid the catch.

Gripping the torch in his teeth, he went in head first. His groping hands located a flush-tank. He pulled himself in by it, inch by grunting inch; lowered himself to the floor of a tiny lavatory. He shut the window.

He eased the door open and listened. His heart was beating so loudly he couldn't hear anything else. He stepped out and flashed the torch. He tiptoed along the brick passageway to a door at the far end. It was unlocked.

The sweet stink of cellulose stung his membranes. He stopped and listened again; then flicked on the torch. It flashed back at him from the bodywork of several of the German cars; they were on blocks, apparently undergoing repairs. Larry played the torch along the work-bench. It all looked very normal. He worked the light around the wall.

Suddenly he killed the beam. He thought he had heard a footstep. He stood still and listened. A minute passed. Two. The sound was not repeated.

He flicked on the torch again. He took a look at the cars, and noticed with surprise that they were new. It was odd that they should be in for repair. In each case the front bumpers had been removed. He looked at the parts of the frame from which they had been unbolted. They told him nothing.

He passed the torch round the rest of the shop. There was a blast furnace in the far corner and a rack of crucibles. He gently lifted out one of the clay pots and looked inside. It was new. He took out others. All new. On the bottom rack was one which wasn't new. He shone the torch into it.

Gold! He dropped the light on the floor. It smashed. He fumbled about for it, clicked the switch, shook it. The bulb was broken. But he had seen it—the residue of gold!

He crouched there in the darkness, his mind seething with excitement. The cars were imported with gold wings! He had unearthed a million-dollar racket. Batch after batch, year after year, the cars had been coming in, and in each batch, maybe, there were two or three with the front wings made of thin pressed gold. Ferdie had been melting them down, fitting on new ones, and selling the cars the usual way.

Everyone knew there was big money to be made these days in Tangier. Business men everywhere were anxious to get their money in, but the currency restrictions in most countries would make that tricky. So, it seemed, Ferdie had hit on this scheme to help German business men evade the restrictions. The cars, maybe, were sidetracked on their way to shipment, fitted out with the cellulosed, pressed gold duplicates in a matter of hours.

He, Larry, must have fitted in right at the beginning when

Ferdie had first got the idea. There could be only one distributor for the German cars in a town the size of Tangier and Larry already had the contract safe in his pocket. Ferdie had known darn well he wouldn't sell. So he had roped in Alger for the rough stuff. The chances were Alger was in debt to him—he was to practically everybody else.

Larry fumbled the crucible back into its rack and straightened up. He had to get to the police. He groped his way back to the door and stepped out into the passage.

There was a sudden blaze of light; whether it was a torch or whether it sprang up like a flame in his own head, Larry never knew.

He found himself lying on his back in Alger's conservatory. There was no time-lapse; he remembered no blow. One moment he was in the garage, and the next he was blinking up at the blacked-out glass dome.

A huge face was within a few inches of his own, breathing stertorously with the effort of doing something to his hands. A pulse was beating in his head with the force of incessant blows. His mouth and throat were stuffed so full of rag that the panic of suffocation filled his mind.

He struggled feebly. The click of handcuffs came to him. The face grunted and drew away upwards; diminished to normal size. Cleaver looked down at him. Behind him was Ferdie; in the greenish light his ugly face was grotesque with worry.

"Are you certain there's no mark?"

"Feel his head for yourself. No cut, no bump—nothing. The sand split my sock though." Cleaver pulled up his trouser-leg; displayed one bare ankle. "I'm charging a new pair to you."

"This is no time for joking. Look, he is coming round."

Larry squirmed about on the floor. With bulging eyes he saw that his wrists were handcuffed round the back of a pipe. It was the waste-pipe of a sink—the sort of shallow sink used for filling watering-cans in a conservatory. He made a choking sound.

Ferdie stood in front of Larry, looking down at him. "You are a fool, Larry," he said. "You were free. I would have loaned you a little money. Everything could have been fine for you. Instead you have to come and stick your nose in. Now—" He lifted his shoulders.

He turned as the door opened. Alger came in. His larger-than-life face looked saggy. "I can't find a thing. I don't know where the servants keep anything."

"There must be something. I can't see what is wrong with this sink."

" Too shallow. Look—" Alger ran a hand through his thick hair—" Ferdie, do we have to do it this way? "

The German made a helpless gesture. " We've been through all that. This is the only way that looks natural."

" I know. It's just—we may not be able to handle him. The pain is supposed to drive men crazy. They become delirious, hitting, biting, screaming. They have been known to hack their own limbs off to stop the agony—"

" But you told me that profound collapse occurs."

" I did. But it may take hours. How do I know? I have guests in the house, and—"

" Relax," Cleaver said. " With a wad like that in his mouth he won't make a sound."

Ferdie looked at Cleaver uneàsily, then back to Alger. " He's right. We have gone too far to turn back. Heaven knows, I'm a business man, not a murderer. But things have a way of finishing differently from the way they start."

" Listen," Cleaver said, " would that fish-tank in the hall do you? It's just big enough to force a guy's foot into."

Ferdie looked at Alger. The actor avoided his eyes. Ferdie took him by the arm and led him towards the door. " Come on."

Larry realized what they were planning to do. In a red, choking mist he watched them walk away. The sun-room light flared for an instant and they were gone.

Cleaver lit a cigarette and looked down at him quizzically. " Brother, I bet you wish you'd never started this! "

Larry got a grip on himself. He swivelled his burning eyeballs upwards to the pipe. It was lead. He dragged the handcuff chain across it. Not a hope. He put his weight on it. The effort set him choking again. The sink was rock-firm.

Cleaver walked over to one of the tanks and peered into it. " Can you see it, Villiers? This is the one. Synan-something. The sea-scorpion. When they pick you up out of the sea, it will look as if you trod on it while out for a swim."

Larry groped up under the sink. The pipe was fixed to the waste by means of a big octagonal nut. He tried to turn it, but he was too weak. He had to turn it! He gripped it in both hands.

" We've got the Merc here," Cleaver said to the tank. " When they fish you out, it will be parked down on the beach road with your clothes in it."

Locking every muscle, making a tool of his whole body, Larry strained at the nut. It shifted. Hope flared in him. He changed his grip; moved it again. Once the drag was off it, it turned freely. He fumbled it round in a daze of apprehension. As Cleaver turned towards him, Larry froze.

" Neat, you must admit," Cleaver said. Larry stared at him, not daring to move.

He had felt the nut come free in his hand.

Cleaver suddenly frowned. " Say! What are you doing under there? " He strode forward.

Larry arched his body off the ground and dragged on the pipe with his full weight. The lead bent, came clear of its socket. He jerked the handcuff chain up over the top of the pipe and rolled sideways—just as Cleaver made a grab at him. He scrambled, choking, to his feet. The two of them straightened up simultaneously. Larry chopped down onto Cleaver's head with his interlocked fists. Cleaver staggered and ducked away. Larry dragged down the gag and tore the rag out of his mouth; gasped air into his lungs.

He went after Cleaver like a mad thing. He ran him up against the tanks, butted him in the face, raked his head with the handcuffs, kicked him, drove him to his knees, clubbed him with his interlocked fists. Cleaver hit the marble like a wet sack.

Larry stood over him, swaying and gasping. His heart was turning somersaults. He couldn't wait for it to ease up. He felt Cleaver swiftly over for a gun. He wasn't wearing one. He looked round for a weapon. There was nothing. He ran towards the sun-room. Halfway along the conservatory he stopped. Footsteps were hurrying across the drawing-room.

He stared round. There was no way out. He was trapped. With sudden desperation he ran back towards the sink.

Clasping his arms round his head, he dived out through the glass of the conservatory.

He hit the terrace on his back in a shower of fragments, and sprawled there, half stunned, for a moment. Somehow he got up and staggered towards the drive. A big sedan was parked outside the house, but there was no sign of the Mercedes.

Behind him he heard the sun-room doors trundling open.

" There he is. Get him! " Alger's voice hissed.

It was too late to try and start the sedan. Larry turned and ran down the drive. He heard Ferdie call out: " Quick, Cleaver —the car! Block the gate! "

Larry reeled on. He heard footsteps start after him on the gravel. It was like a dream: his legs just wouldn't work. He swung them from the hip, his head strained back on his neck, the air scuffing in his throat. Somewhere a car door slammed. An engine started.

He got himself round a bend in the drive. And then, unbelievably, just ahead of him he saw the Mercedes! He realized

that Cleaver must have parked it away from the house because of the noise. It was facing the wrong way. The footsteps were gaining on him. He stumbled to his knees, got up, almost fell against the car. He dragged himself into the seat and groped with both hands for the key.

It was there. He went through the movements instinctively. The engine thundered into life, there was a crash of gears, and the Mercedes jerked forward. Alger had almost reached the car. He flung himself to one side. The car missed him by less than a foot. Larry hardly knew which way he was going. Suddenly the sedan came round the bend straight at him. Headlights flared in his eyes. He hauled the wheel over with both hands.

The Mercedes ploughed up over the verge and crashed through the bushes. He kept his foot hard on the accelerator and pulled her round in a wide arc, back onto the drive. He snatched a look back.

The sedan had stopped; it was picking up the others. Larry accelerated down to the gate, then he headed up the mountain, zigzagging crazily. At the back of his mind was the idea that by turning away from the town he might fool the others. But the sedan was too close: it swung out practically on his tail.

The road wound dangerously upward. Bracing the wheel with his knee, he got the car up into third. In third the Mercedes could go faster than the sedan in top; there was no need to do any more changing. He grabbed at the light-switch. The big Bosches flared into life, cutting the rocks and furze out from the darkness as if by a knife.

Somehow, raking the wheel from side to side with his handcuffed hands, he managed to hold her on the road. The night wind began to clear his head. He steadied up, using the supercharged engine with more of his old skill. Slowly, then, the lights of the sedan dropped behind. One corner separated them. Two. Three. His headlamps suddenly picked out a pair of white gate-posts, flanking the road. Acting on impulse, he braked, hauled the car in through the gates, and switched off the headlamps.

A moment later the sedan rushed by. Larry backed out into the road and went after it. Once they realized they had lost him, they might try to make a bolt for it over the Zone frontier. He wasn't going to let that happen.

The road was really bad now. On one side there was a glaring white parapet with, beyond it, nothing. Larry gained on the sedan steadily. As soon as he saw the big headlamps creeping up on him, Cleaver realized what had happened, and began driving recklessly in an effort to shake the Mercedes off. But Larry

drove right up onto his tail. He half expected Ferdie and Alger to start shooting, but nothing happened.

He crowded the sedan faster and faster. It began rocking from side to side, its wheels shrieking on the corners. It hit the parapet, bounced off, kept going.

Suddenly the road straightened out ahead. Larry swung out and crashed down on the accelerator. The supercharger came in with a roar, and the Mercedes drew level with the sedan. They raced along together. Larry braced himself, and began to bear in. Their bumpers locked. He began to nudge the sedan into the rock wall. Cleaver tried to drive against him, but the sedan hadn't a chance against the two-and-a-half-ton car. He stamped on the brake. Larry braked with him, forcing him hard in against the rock.

There was a grinding crash. The near wing of the sedan flew off like a bit of paper. Still locked, the two cars screeched to a standstill—the sedan jammed full-length against the rock.

Larry jumped out onto the sedan's off-side fender and wrenched up its bonnet. In an instant he had torn out the high-tension leads.

He climbed off onto the road. Alger and Ferdie were struggling to get the doors open, but the Mercedes was tight up against them. They wound down the windows.

Larry picked up a rock. "All right!" he said. "I brain the first head I see."

He was tensed to drop at the first sight of a gun. But nothing happened. They had been so sure of themselves they hadn't bothered to take guns.

"What are you going to do?" It was Ferdie's voice. It quivered with shock.

"Do?" Larry laughed. It was a hard, flat sound. "I've done it."

He climbed up on the back of the Mercedes and made himself comfortable, holding the rock between his manacled hands. It might be some time before a car came along that could fetch the police.

It was a cool, lonely night up there in the mountains, with the Atlantic wind soughing across the rocks. He sat there, shivering a little from the reaction. But he didn't care. What was one more lonely night to him?

* * *

FIELD-DAY

The love-season is the carnival of egoism.

GEORGE MEREDITH

A GAME OF PATIENCE

More people cheat at that than at anything else

by NIGEL BALCHIN

MY share of the meal had been some whitebait, some cheese, and a cup of coffee. The bill was for four pounds, three and sixpence.

" You once told me that the last proprietor of this place was executed," I said rather bitterly. " It wasn't by any chance for highway robbery? "

My Uncle Charles shook his head. " No—just ordinary murder. The circumstances were not uninteresting. I will tell you about it sometime." He sighed and said sadly, " If I were a younger man, with less knowledge of the world, I suppose I should be offering to pay the bill, or at least to split it with you."

" Why? " I said, astonished.

" On the grounds that I have won some money. I won twenty-five pounds at the Marshalls' at bridge last night."

" Well, it's very decent of you . . ."

" But you and I know," said my Uncle Charles firmly, " that to him a sum of that kind can be the height of misfortune. I do not know the Marshalls well, and have only played with them a couple of times before. But they are a pair of quietly incompetent performers who, properly nursed, would have meant a steady two or three pounds a week to me for the next ten years. As it is, having lost twenty-five pounds in an evening, they will never ask me there again. I tried hard to avoid it. But when I doubled their final ludicrous grand-slam bid in an effort to save them, they merely re-doubled. They made two tricks and I went out into the night. The thing may or may not end in a divorce between them. It is certainly the end of bridge with them for me."

" You believe in small profits and steady returns? "

" It is the only possible principle nowadays, in any form of gambling which involves skill. In the good old days, when the Duchess of Devonshire was prepared to lose £50,000 at a sitting, it was different. But at a mere five shillings a hundred one must be prepared to consider one's winnings as a modest pension rather than as the making of a fortune."

" Nobody can afford to play high nowadays."

" Nobody ever could." My Uncle Charles smiled gently to himself. " I have, in fact, taken part in a game of cards which ended in one of the players writing a cheque for eight hundred pounds, and he certainly could not afford it. But even so, it was, in a way, an illustration of my point that to win may be disastrous and to lose profitable."

" I don't quite follow you."

My Uncle Charles glanced round the restaurant. " You have paid the bill," he said. " If you were to order two more brandies, now, it is possible, though not likely, that they will forget to charge you for them. In the meantime, I will clarify my last statement."

I have never been enthusiastic about the French Riviera which, to me, is a place where all the people I want to avoid go in order to meet each other. I cannot now recall why, some twenty-five years ago, I spent some time at Nice; and the whole incident is made even more baffling by the fact that I appear to have been staying in a hotel. But it was certainly in the bar of a hotel in Nice that I first met Mr. Brander Heavistone.

We were sitting at adjoining tables, and were inadvertently introduced by a waiter who spilt a tray of drinks over the pair of us. Mr. Heavistone was not a difficult man to get to know, and by the time we had mopped ourselves up and made sure that none of the liquid had gone on his companion's dress, he was ordering replacements for all three of us.

Mr. Heavistone was a middle-aged American who wore the type of rather thick spectacles that magnify the eyes of the wearer. He was a quiet, soft-spoken man with a rather slow, courteous manner. The English have a maddening habit of assuming that all Americans of this type are Southerners. In fact, Mr. Heavistone came from Detroit, and I think he had made his money, of which there appeared to be a good deal, in some offshoot of the automobile industry.

His companion, whom he introduced as Miss Tracer, was obviously English. In fact, in both appearance and manner, she might have sat for a very flattering portrait of The English Girl. I guessed her age at about twenty-five. She had light brown hair, very fine blue eyes, lovely skin, and very nice manners.

I must say that as casual acquaintances to pick up in a bar in Nice, they were both exceptionally pleasant. How they had first met, I never knew, but they did not know one another very well. Perhaps somebody had spilt a tray of drinks over them somewhat earlier. We spent a pleasant half-hour together and then parted.

Mr. Heavistone was staying in the hotel and so was I, and

during the next few days I saw him several times, and exchanged a few words. On a couple of occasions, Miss Tracer was with him, and somewhere during this time I learnt that she lived in a villa just outside the town with her father, who was a retired soldier. From what she said I inferred that they were not well off, and merely lived in the South of France because of her father's health.

She seemed to worry a good deal about the fact that her father was bored and rather lonely, and one evening she asked me to come out to the villa with Mr. Heavistone and herself to meet him. Mr. Heavistone, I gathered, had been there a couple of times before. I had nothing to do, she was a very attractive girl, and I liked both her and Heavistone, so I was glad to accept.

The villa was a couple of miles to the east of the town, and very much as I expected—comfortable, pleasant, but quite unpretentious. Colonel Tracer more or less completed the picture—a tall, handsome man of about sixty with closely cut iron-grey hair and a bearing of quiet dignity.

He was playing patience when we arrived, and I gathered from his daughter that he spent many hours doing so. I am no expert at patience, and did not recognize the form of the game he was playing; but Heavistone did, and insisted that he should finish it. However, the game came out in a few minutes, and the Colonel then joined us, and we sat and chatted very pleasantly. It was obvious that the Colonel and his daughter were devoted to one another, and one could not help feeling that it was a slightly pathetic household in which the elderly man and the young girl each worried a good deal about the other, without the means to do much about it.

Colonel Tracer and Heavistone talked at some length about patience, of which they were both fond, and in the course of conversation I was asked if I played. When I said that I did not play patience but was fond of other card games, I saw the Colonel's face light up.

He seemed to hesitate for a moment, and I saw him glance almost guiltily at his daughter. Then he said: "Do you play poker?"

"Yes."

"Do you, Mr. Heavistone?"

"I have done, Colonel."

"Then we must make up a little school one evening." He looked at his daughter defiantly. "I hardly ever get a chance to play poker now, and I'm very fond of it. That would be nice, wouldn't it, Leo?"

Miss Tracer smiled and said, "Of course," without, I thought,

much enthusiasm. But the Colonel insisted on going on and arranging for us to come out and play two evenings later. He was obviously delighted at the prospect, and when we were leaving he reminded us both in turn of the engagement.

By now Mr. Heavistone and I were on terms of considerable friendship, and it was our habit to meet in the bar before dinner most evenings. The evening after our visit to the Colonel's villa we were sitting there when Miss Tracer entered. We, of course, rose to greet her and offered her a drink. She accepted and sat down with us, but it was not difficult to see that she was nervous and ill at ease.

After a very few minutes' rather laboured conversation, Heavistone happened to mention that we should be seeing her the following evening.

Miss Tracer hesitated for a moment and then said bluntly: "Yes. I—I want to talk to you about that. In fact, to be quite frank, that's what I came here about this evening. I hoped you'd be here and . . . Would you mind if I asked you something?"

Heavistone said, "Why, sure. Go ahead."

She looked at her glass and twirled it by the stem. "It's about Daddy and—and playing poker."

I said gently, "You don't like him to play, do you?"

"How did you know that?" she said sharply.

"I saw your face when he proposed it."

"It's not that I don't like him to play," she said slowly. "In fact, I like him to, because he does love it and he's very lonely, and doesn't have much fun. It's just . . ." She looked up, and the blue eyes were very worried. "Well, frankly, I'm always scared that he'll lose more than he can afford."

"Does he tend to lose?" said Heavistone.

"Oh, not particularly. He says he's a very good player and I dare say he is. But once or twice when he's played with people, he's told me afterwards the sort of amounts they were playing for, and I've wondered what would have happened if—if he *had* lost. You see, the poor old darling hasn't a cent except his pension and . . . Once he played and won two hundred pounds in an evening. He was terribly pleased and, being Daddy, went straight off and spent it on me, which was very nice, of course. But I couldn't help wondering what would have happened if he'd *lost* the two hundred. He'll never listen to me. He just laughs and says he's too good a player to lose too much. But surely even the best of players do have runs of bad luck?"

"They do," I said, with feeling.

"They certainly do," said Mr. Heavistone.

"So what I wanted to ask you," said Leonora, "was whether you'd mind not—not playing for much tomorrow. I've no right to ask you, and it may make it awfully dull for you. But you've both been so very kind, and I thought perhaps you wouldn't mind . . ." There were tears in her eyes.

Mr. Heavistone gave her a gentle pat on the arm. "Don't you worry," he said. "We'll watch it, won't we, Charles?"

"Of course."

"Only he'll try to make you play for a lot. He always does."

I said, "I never play for more than I can afford, and that's practically nothing."

"I can't honestly say that," said Mr. Heavistone, smiling, "but I certainly never like to play for enough to make any difference to anybody present. And that goes if we play for matches."

She said: "Oh no—you'll have to play for *something*, otherwise he'll be hurt. But just—not an awful lot."

"Be all right if he lost ten pounds?"

"Yes. Quite. But not—not much more than that."

"O.K.," he said. "Then we know where we are."

She gave us both a small, rather pathetic smile. "Mind you, he mustn't ever know I asked you. He'd be . . . I don't know what he'd do."

"That's all right," said Mr. Heavistone. "Hell, we understand, Leo. Have another drink."

"No, thank you," she said, "I've got to get back and see to Daddy's dinner. Good-bye and thank you very much. See you tomorrow."

When she had gone, Mr. Heavistone said: "Now, that's a nice girl."

"Yes. As a matter of fact, if the old boy does like to bang it up, I'm glad she told us. Otherwise it might have been a bit awkward."

"I doubt the Colonel'd come to much harm, my poker being the way it is. He's probably pretty good. He's certainly a smart patience player."

"Can you be a smart patience player? I thought it was pure chance."

"Well, it is and it isn't. But I'd say the Colonel would be all right. Still, you never know. Something might have gone wrong, and anyhow, I wouldn't like that little girl to worry. Might have been awkward, as you say."

"I wasn't really thinking of him so much as of me."

Mr. Heavistone eyed me. "Why?"

"Well, I rarely play for much money. And never with anybody I don't know—even if it's somebody like the Colonel."

Mr. Heavistone smiled his gentle smile. "Nor me," he said. "So now we can all play a shilling limit just for the hell of it."

In the event, we didn't play a shilling limit the following evening, but it was certainly a very harmless game.

Leonora did not play, but there was a fourth man about whom I can now remember absolutely nothing except that he spoke English like an Italian.

As his daughter had prophesied, the Colonel made a couple of attempts to get the stakes to a more interesting level, but when he got no support from Heavistone or me he did not press it. I fancy Leonora had been lecturing him.

He struck me as a good player, but not exceptionally so. He was one of those people who go a trifle exaggeratedly calm and expressionless when they bluff, which is an elementary fault, but one which very few people can spot in themselves. However, on the evening, he won about a couple of pounds, and so did I. Mr. Heavistone lost about three pounds. He was a poor player and evidently had not played the game much. It was not an exciting evening, but it was pleasant enough, and the Colonel obviously enjoyed it immensely.

On the way home Mr. Heavistone said: "Well, I hope the old boy goes out tomorrow and buys Leo a box of candy with his winnings."

This was the pattern of several evenings that followed. Usually the vague Italian person made a fourth, and on one occasion there were five of us. The Colonel always made some effort to get us to play for real money, but never pressed it when we objected. On the whole, being a reasonable player, he usually won; but on the three or four occasions we went there, I doubt if anybody was more than ten pounds up or down.

Mr. Heavistone never said so, but I think he was a trifle bored by the whole business. He did not really like poker much, and would have been happier just to sit and talk to Leonora—as, indeed, I should.

But the Colonel liked his game of poker, and on one occasion when we tried playing bridge instead, he clearly felt that it was a waste of valuable time. It was all very peaceful and pleasant, if a trifle dull, and so it remained right up to the fatal evening when Monsieur de Grouchy called.

Four of us were playing as usual—the Colonel, Mr. Heavistone, the Italian, and myself. The only unusual thing about the occasion was that Mr. Heavistone, whose game had improved considerably with practice, had been winning. He may have won thirty shillings. Leonora had left the room a few minutes before.

We had just finished a hand, when she returned and said, "Daddy—here's Monsieur de Grouchy."

She said it as though something delightful had happened, but there was a look in her face that told me that it wasn't delightful at all. The Colonel, however, seemed genuinely pleased and jumped up, saying, "Well, well—just the man we want," and proceeded to introduce us.

Presumably, from his name and his appearance, Monsieur de Grouchy was a Frenchman. He was a slim, rather dapper, youngish man with very sleek black hair and a sallow skin. But his English was absolutely perfect, and if he had an accent at all it was very faintly American.

I cannot say I took to Monsieur de Grouchy at first sight. I noticed that he greeted the Colonel with considerably less warmth than the Colonel showed towards him; and though what he said was polite enough, there was something slightly insolent in his smile and his manner.

While he was being introduced to Heavistone, I caught Leonora's eye and she gave me a quick, anxious shake of the head. For a moment I didn't understand what she was trying to say. But it soon became clear.

Monsieur de Grouchy was saying: "—I happened to be in Nice, and thought I'd just drop in to see if there was any chance of my revenge."

"You couldn't have come at a better time," said the Colonel. He turned to us. "Last time de Grouchy was here I trimmed him properly. Two hundred pounds, wasn't it?"

"Something like that," said de Grouchy, with his smile. "But you will admit, Colonel, that the cards ran for you."

"Oh yes. Up to a point, anyhow." The Colonel smiled at him. "But the cards always *do* run for the good player, you know."

"That's exactly what I want to see," said de Grouchy. He walked over to the table and flicked some cards through his fingers. "Well—am I allowed to come in?"

The Italian said quickly: "You will take my place, sir. I have to go."

The Colonel started to protest, but the Italian was already bowing to Leonora. He was a remarkably imperceptible little man, and he simply faded himself out of the room firmly, neatly, and rapidly. I had a strong impression that he had tried this party before and didn't propose to try it again. As Leonora went out with him, the Colonel said, "Never mind, we're four, which is always a nice game."

I glanced at Heavistone and he at me. The same thought, of

course, had occurred to both of us. If the Colonel had taken two hundred pounds off de Grouchy the last time he had been there, he could hardly offer him a hand in a game where, with a bit of luck, he might win thirty shillings. We had promised Leonora to keep the game small, and I for one didn't particularly relish a big game with a character like de Grouchy, Heavistone who wasn't a good player, and the Colonel to worry about. On the other hand, we could hardly refuse to play, particularly now the Italian had ducked out.

The Colonel said briskly, "Well, come along, here's de Grouchy panting to give us the money. Let's get going." He moved towards the table.

Heavistone said in his quiet way, "Look, gentlemen, I don't want to spoil the fun, but I'm a small-timer at this game, and so's my friend here."

"Oh, come," said the Colonel. "It won't hurt us to bang it up a bit for once." His eyes were shining with pleasure and excitement. "We've all been good boys for a long time. Here's a chance to make some cigar money."

"It may not hurt you, sir, but it might hurt me. I'm a poor player, as you know."

"You're right in the middle of a streak of luck. Come on—you can't let me down, Heavistone."

Leonora had come back and was sitting by the fire, very tense and upright. Her face was rather pale.

I started to say: "Well, I agree with Heavistone . . ." when de Grouchy cut in.

"But surely there is no problem," he said, with the smile that made one want to kick him. "You and I wish to play poker, Colonel. If these gentlemen do not wish to trust their skill or their luck against us, we can do one of two things. We can play for points, the points between us having a rather higher value, when we come to settle, than the points between them, or between us and them. Or we can play an ordinary game in which, after all, anybody can always throw in his cards if he feels that the risks are becoming excessive."

There was no answer to that—particularly said as he said it. I glanced at Leonora and saw her give a tiny, helpless shrug of the shoulders and sink wearily back in her chair.

Heavistone had gone slightly red at de Grouchy's tone. He hesitated for a moment and then said coldly, "Very well, Colonel. If you wish it. I only hope I don't spoil your game." He sat down and so did I.

It wasn't a very happy start to the game and it didn't continue very happily. De Grouchy made no secret of the fact that he was

after the Colonel—and not in any friendly way. And the Colonel knew it and liked it. Heavistone stuck to his guns and played very small, so that he was hardly ever in the game, which was a pity, since his streak of luck was continuing. I compromised. For a while I felt my way very carefully, and during that time I came to two conclusions—that de Grouchy was a first-class player and that the Colonel was a far worse one playing high than he was when playing our friendly game where there was no money in it. In fact, I didn't like the look of it at all.

As the cards fell, the first half-hour was slightly farcical, since Heavistone and I, who weren't seriously in the game, held very good cards, and de Grouchy and the Colonel, who were panting to cut one another's throats, held nothing at all. Even they weren't prepared to go very far on a pair of tens, which was the sort of thing that took the pots—usually after Heavistone had thrown in three aces.

Eventually I got tired of it and took ten pounds off de Grouchy, holding a full house to his three kings. When he saw my hand he smiled thinly and said: "Only a full house? I thought you must have at least fours to be as reckless as that."

After that, things began to warm up a bit, as he and the Colonel began to get more cards; and right from the start de Grouchy had the edge on him. It wasn't that he was particularly lucky, though he had what little luck was going. It was mainly that he was simply the better player, and that he could spot the Colonel's over-expressionless bluff every time. I had a few cracks at him myself and on balance was slightly up. But he never went very high with me, and once the Colonel was out, he barely pretended to be interested.

After the first hour I should say he was about fifty pounds up on the Colonel, and a few down on me. Then he had a very good patch and cleaned up a couple of big pots, so that by about eleven o'clock he'd certainly had his revenge for his two hundred pounds, and a bit over.

I was getting more and more unhappy, and so was Heavistone. We were both remembering what Leonora had said: *If he'd lost two hundred instead of winning it, I don't know what would have happened.* The Colonel himself seemed much less worried than we were. Perhaps a bit of the sparkle had gone out of him, but he certainly wasn't acting like a man who had lost enough to matter to him.

At eleven o'clock Heavistone looked at his watch and said, "Well, gentlemen, I hate to break up a good party but . . ."

The Colonel said, "Oh, come now, Heavistone—we can't let this fellow get away with it. It's only eleven o'clock."

I said, " I'm a bit weary myself."

" What are you worrying about, Charles? You're winning."

De Grouchy said, " I am, of course, at everybody's disposal. But last time—on which occasion I was losing—we broke up at four."

" Well, if you think *I'm* going on till four in the morning, sir, you're wrong," said Heavistone. It was the nearest to an acid remark that I ever heard him make to anybody.

The Colonel sighed and said, " They've got no stamina, these people, have they, de Grouchy? Look, Heavistone, I tell you what—give it another hour and then we'll stop. At twelve sharp."

" I don't really want to, Colonel."

" But you must give me a chance to take it back from this fellow. It's been running all his way for the last hour, and now it ought to even out."

Mr. Heavistone hesitated and looked at me. But I had nothing to offer. If there was any truth in what Leonora had said, the Colonel was pretty well in already. If he wanted to try to get himself out, at the risk of going in further, one could hardly stop him.

Heavistone said helplessly, " All right. Twelve sharp, then," and on we went.

If the previous hour had been worrying, the last hour was a nightmare; for de Grouchy went straight into as big a run of luck as I have ever seen. It wasn't only that he held good cards, but that they were always *just* good enough, and at poker that can be heart-breaking. I can even remember an actual occasion when they both held a full house, de Grouchy's being queens and sevens, and the Colonel's being knaves and fives.

It was all like that, and there was nothing we could do but sit and watch it. The Colonel didn't play badly. In fact, the more he lost, the better and more calmly he seemed to play. But there was nothing he could do about it. There was nothing anybody could have done about it. He had reasonable cards—even good ones. He played them reasonably and he lost practically every hand—by midnight, he must have owed de Grouchy at least five hundred pounds.

As we threw the cards in at five to twelve, Heavistone looked at his watch and said, " Well—that's that."

The Colonel smiled and said, " The verdict of the umpires is that there's time for one more over." He was still as calm as ever. If the strain was telling, it merely made his face look rather older than usual.

De Grouchy said, " In which he hopes to hit many runs." He

was obviously proud of his knowledge of English colloquialisms. Nobody else said anything, and the Colonel dealt.

My cards, I remember, were of no interest. I had a pair of sixes, and drew one more six. Heavistone told me afterwards that he had a pair of queens and a pair of fours. Neither was the sort of hand which was very relevant in the circumstances.

But from the very outset, de Grouchy and the Colonel went out against one another. De Grouchy called for two cards and the Colonel took one, and then the fun began. I was pretty sure from the start of it that the Colonel held fours of something, and for a long time my guess was that de Grouchy had a full house. But he went on with complete confidence and eventually I began to wonder. He must guess that the Colonel held fours, after that draw of one card. The question was whether he had drawn the fourth of something or whether he was bluffing—or indeed whether they both were.

(My Uncle Charles paused and tapped the ash off his cigar. I noticed that his hand was trembling slightly.)

I have implied that the Colonel was not really a very good player. In justice to him, I must say that in his place I should have done exactly what he did. He was a lot of money down, and on his cards he had the right to think he had caught de Grouchy at last. In fact, his nerves held rather better than the other man's, and when eventually de Grouchy raised to three hundred pounds to " see " him, the Colonel was still raising with the air of a man who will do so indefinitely. The Colonel put down four kings and de Grouchy smiled and put down four aces.

There was a moment's pause and then Mr. Heavistone said, " Good God! "

The Colonel smiled and said, " There's no justice. Moral—never play against the run of the cards."

De Grouchy said, " You *worried* me. I thought you'd picked up the joker to four." It was the only thing he said in the course of the evening with no unpleasant edge in it.

I said nothing, having nothing in particular to say. After a few moments the Colonel gathered up the cards as though he was not altogether sure what he was doing, and said, " Well, well—a pleasant game, if mildly disastrous. Add up, will you? "

He turned to Leonora who was still sitting staring into the fire. " Darling, bring me my cheque-book, will you? "

She brought it, and the end of it was that he made out a cheque for eight hundred and thirty odd pounds and gave it to de Grouchy and she stood and watched him. He was an elderly man, but I noticed that he signed the cheque without a tremor,

and turned and smiled at her in a crooked way. I had been sorry for the Colonel before, that evening, but that was the moment I really disliked.

Heavistone and I were very silent in the car, going back to Nice, but I remember saying: " What will the old boy do now? I doubt if he's got eight hundred pounds in the world."

Mr. Heavistone was silent for a moment and then said with sudden and rather startling bitterness, " No, sir. But he's got a daughter."

To say that I lay awake that night, worrying about Colonel Tracer's losses, would be an exaggeration. I am constitutionally incapable of lying awake at night, worrying about anybody's troubles, including my own. But I must confess that I felt very unhappy about the whole affair. Whilst nobody could very well hold Heavistone and myself responsible, the fact remained that Leonora had more or less committed the Colonel to our care, and we had sat by, however excusably, and let him do exactly the thing that she had most feared.

I was forcibly reminded of a time when, as an undergraduate, I had been given charge of the only son of a widowed mother on Boat Race night, and at four o'clock the following morning had been forced to lay the body on her doorstep, ring the bell, and run. I was therefore embarrassed, though not at all surprised, when Leonora walked into the lounge of the hotel on the following morning when I was drinking my morning coffee. Mr. Heavistone, unfortunately, had not yet appeared.

I said all the obvious things—how sorry I was, how unfortunate it had all been, how we had seen no easy way out, and so on. I then braced myself for the reproaches.

In this, however, I had underestimated Leonora. She apologized for having given us what she felt must have been a very unpleasant evening, pointed out rather bitterly that it was no responsibility of ours if the Colonel would do these things, and thanked us for our efforts to stop him. She then smiled in a rather strained way and said, " What I want from you is some advice. What do I do now? "

" He can't afford to lose the money? "

" He not only can't afford it—he hasn't got it."

" He gave de Grouchy a cheque."

" Anybody can write cheques. He hasn't *got* eight hundred pounds."

" You're sure? "

" Absolutely. He's got one hundred and seven pounds, three and eightpence in that account, and the monthly bills are due in a week. When that rat de Grouchy tries to cash that cheque the

bank will refuse it, and Daddy will then talk some nonsense about his honour and shoot himself. Or say he will."

She picked up a couple of lumps of sugar and began to roll them as if they were dice. "I don't understand about male honour," she said bitterly. "It seems that you can play cards for money that ought to pay the tradesmen, or that you haven't got, and as long as you win you're still a gentleman. But if you lose, you're a cad and ought to shoot yourself. Is being a gentleman being lucky, or just not being found out?"

I said, "Either or both."

"Well, anyhow, how do I lay hands on seven hundred and fifty pounds in the next few hours? Have *you* got seven hundred and fifty pounds?"

"No, my dear."

"I thought not. Nobody ever has."

"Does that villa belong to you?"

"No. We only rent it."

"Anything you can sell? Jewellery or anything?"

"There's my watch. And my necklace that was Mummy's. They're worth a bit, but not as much as that." She flicked one of the lumps of sugar away impatiently. "The maddening thing is that in about six months I get a thousand pounds."

"How?"

"Under my Aunt's will. When I'm twenty-five. But that isn't till December."

"You might borrow on it."

"Yes. But not by midday today which is about the latest it's likely to be any good." She suddenly gave a slightly hysterical giggle. "Where's Uncle Heavistone? He must have seven hundred and fifty pounds he wouldn't miss."

"I shouldn't think so. He's only here on holiday. But you might ask him."

"Hardly."

"Why not?"

"How could I?"

"You asked me."

"Only for fun." She smiled wryly. "I can hardly go round asking casual acquaintances to pay Daddy's betting losses when I've no security or . . ."

"How about your Aunt's will?"

"But why should he, anyhow?"

"I've never seen why anybody should lend anybody money. But in my experience they often do."

She hesitated. "You really think he might?"

"If he's got it. He was very put out about the whole thing."

Leonora sat for a moment in silence. Then she glanced at her watch and sat up.

" Right," she said quietly. " It is now ten-thirty. I shall go and try to borrow seven hundred and fifty pounds off Mr. Heavistone if I can find him . . ." She paused. " You—you wouldn't like to come with me, Charles? I haven't had a lot of experience of this sort of thing."

My Uncle Charles paused. " There were tears in her eyes," he said pensively. " I have already said that they were very blue eyes.

" As one who has borrowed a good deal of money in his time, I am perennially interested in the psychology of the touchee. The experienced borrower, of course, knows his man. He knows whether the poor wretch, in an agony of embarrassment, will mutter: ' Of course, old man, of course,' and press the money into his hand; or whether he will settle for half the amount requested; or whether he will say with artificial firmness that he never lends money but will willingly give it you; or whether he will produce the money and take the opportunity of offering a few words of advice.

" All these and many others are the common coin of borrowing, and in my experience these pitiful defensive techniques are not greatly affected by the sum involved. But I must say that I have never seen anybody borrow five pounds, let alone seven hundred and fifty, as quickly as Leonora borrowed it off Mr. Heavistone. The thing, in fact, struck me as mildly indecent."

Mr. Heavistone was sitting in a deck-chair on the terrace. I said, with painful jocularity: " Hullo, Heavistone. Here's Leonora, who wants to borrow some money off you."

Mr. Heavistone got up. " Money? How much, my dear? "

Leonora looked at him and smiled, but she couldn't say anything, so I said, " Oh—about seven hundred and fifty."

" Pounds or dollars or what? "

" Pounds."

Mr. Heavistone made a mental calculation and clicked his tongue. " In that case," he said, " I shall have to go up to my room. I don't carry that much with me."

He was gone about five minutes. When he came down he handed Leonora a thick bundle of notes and said, " It's in dollars, but maybe it doesn't matter. It's money."

Leonora looked at the notes for a moment, and then she stepped forward and kissed Mr. Heavistone on the cheek and turned and ran away. She didn't say anything.

Mr. Heavistone stood, rubbing his cheek, and looking after her. " I dare say," he said, " but what's my chance of ever seeing that back? "

I said, " She's got some money coming to her."

" So what? "

" I should think she'll pay you back."

Mr. Heavistone said: " Why seven-fifty? The Colonel dropped over eight hundred."

" She says there's a hundred in the bank."

Mr. Heavistone was still looking in the direction in which Leonora had gone. " My," he said softly, " there are some pretty good people about. You know, I wouldn't care a lot if I never saw that back."

(My Uncle Charles paused and then suddenly whipped round at me and said, " Have I told you this story before? "

" No," I said.

He shook his head. " I can't think why not. One of the most terrifying aspects of growing old is this sudden conviction—usually entirely justified—that one has told people things before. However . . .")

For the next two days I saw nothing of Mr. Heavistone or Leonora, being involved in a visit along the coast. I still don't know what induced me, when returning to Nice on the third day, to go somewhat out of my way to visit the Colonel's villa. Nor why, as soon as I saw it, before I had left my car, I knew it was empty. Perhaps—who knows?—some vestige of the brains I was born with had really remained with me throughout the whole affair. I like to think so, and to point to the fact that on the whole transaction I personally was in pocket to the extent of some fourteen pounds.

But this is beside the immediate point, which was that the Colonel and Leonora had gone, that they had been gone a couple of days, and that no one appeared to know their next address, and that probably Mr. Heavistone's money had gone too.

As I was driven back to Nice, I kept thinking of Mr. Heavistone's face as he looked after Leonora, and I must confess I felt slightly sick. You must remember that I was a good deal younger then than I am now. Indeed, I remember going into the bar and having a large brandy before I went to see Mr. Heavistone, merely because I was not looking forward to telling him what had happened.

Mr. Heavistone was in his room, playing patience. I think the game must have been at a rather critical stage, because he put another card down and considered for a moment before he looked round at me with his curious magnified eyes.

" Hullo," he said. " Still here? I thought you'd gone."

I said, " No. I've been along the coast. Look here, Heavistone, I'm sorry but I'm afraid I've got a shock for you. We've been swindled."

" We? "

" Well, you have, at least."

" Who by? "

" The Colonel and his daughter. They've bolted."

Mr. Heavistone took another card from the pack, considered it, and put it down with a little grunt. " She isn't his daughter," he said gently, " she's his wife. Come to that, he isn't a Colonel."

" How d'you know? "

" You find these things out—after."

" Did you know they'd gone? "

" I thought they would be." He turned and looked at me and gave a little chuckle. " Tell you the truth, sir, when you didn't show up yesterday, I thought you'd be gone too."

" I! Why? "

" Well, think it over. She was so embarrassed, that poor girl, that she couldn't ask for the money. *You* had to come and . . ."

I said, " My God! "

" Though, mind you," said Mr. Heavistone, " I wasn't sure about you, any more than about the Italian. Now, he may have been in it or he may not. But I doubt it, because then they would have to split the money four ways instead of three."

" You mean de Grouchy was in it? "

" Sure. He had star billing, didn't he? "

I sat down rather limply. " When did you tumble to all this? "

" The first time you and I went out there, sir."

" Then, why on earth did you give her the money? "

Mr. Heavistone shook his head. " I hope they don't try to spend that money. The top note was twenty bucks all right. I thought it had been worth that, and maybe the Colonel can buy her a box of candy with it. But the rest cost five dollars the lot at a shop in Madison Avenue. I had a lot more but I gave it to a ' con man ' in Paris. They make it for conjurors for that trick where they keep pulling thousands of dollars out of a hat."

He shook his head again. " It's surprising how few folks in Europe know what proper American money looks like. You'd think they would by now. They've had enough of it."

I said, " Either I've been so slow that I ought to be in a home, or else you've been damned quick. *How* did you spot it? "

" Well, you don't play patience. You ought to play patience. It's a great game. Now, the Colonel was a smart patience player."

" So you said."

"Yes. Well, the first twice I went out there with the girl, the Colonel was playing patience; and he was playing a sort of patience called Mrs. Kitchner's Ramp, which very few people play. And what is more, sir, he got it out both times. Now, I don't know much about poker, as you've seen, but I know a lot about patience, and if you get Mrs. Kitchner's Ramp out once every six months, you're lucky. So when you and I went there and he got it out again just conveniently so as to come and talk to us, I knew the Colonel was a smart man with cards, and that they came when he called them."

"Then why . . .?"

"Why didn't he take us in the ordinary way? Well, think it over, sir. I doubt you'd have played him for three thousand dollars, nice as he was. You said you wouldn't to me. Nor would I. Nor would anybody. So the way it went was to build up a big story through the girl, and then have a big loss to a four-letter man like de Grouchy, and then it was easy."

I said: "I must have my head attended to. But even now, there's one bit I don't see. Why on earth *should* he cheat himself at patience?"

Mr. Heavistone smiled. "If you played patience, you wouldn't ask that question, sir. More people cheat at patience than at anything else."

He pointed to the table. "Now, look at this. If that last card I turned up had been a nine, then it would have come out. The next card in the pack *is* a nine. And I haven't got a game out for a fortnight. See what I mean?"

Mr. Heavistone sighed and gathered up the cards. "Maybe the Colonel just played patience to give him practice with his trick packs. It takes a lot of practice to be as good as that. Or maybe he was like the rest of us and liked to win. After all, he always had to lose when it came to the big hand, and you can see that would be dull, sir."

★ ★ ★

THE HAMSTER

There is not much about the hamster
To stimulate the epigramster.
The essence of his simple story,
He populates the laboratory.
Then leaves his offspring in the lurch,
Martyrs to medical research.
Was he as bright as people am,
New York would be New Hamsterdam.

OGDEN NASH, *The Private Dining-Room*

BEAUTY BATHING

There, in a Meadow, by the Rivers side,
A Flocke of Nymphes I chaunced to espy

EDMUND SPENSER, *Prothalamion*

In the green water, clear and warm,
Susanna lay.
She searched
The touch of springs,
And found
Concealed imaginings.
She sighed
For so much melody . . .

Soon, with a noise like tambourines,
Came her attendant Byzantines.

They wondered why Susanna cried
Against the elders by her side:

And as they whispered the refrain
Was like a willow swept by rain.

Anon their lamps' uplifted flame
Revealed Susanna and her shame.

And then the simpering Byzantines,
Fled, with a noise like tambourines.

WALLACE STEVENS, *Peter Quince at the Clavier*

High Dive

Young Nouronihar, daughter of the emir, who was as sprightly as an antelope, and full of wanton gaiety, beckoned one of her slaves to let down the great swing which was suspended to the ceiling by cords of silk; and whilst this was doing, winked to her companions in the bath, who, chagrined to be forced from so soothing a state of indolence, began to twist and entangle their hair to plague and detain Bababalouk, and teased him, besides, with a thousand vagaries.

Nouronihar, perceiving that he was nearly out of patience, accosted him, with an arch air of respectful concern, and said, " My lord! it is not by any means decent that the chief eunuch of the caliph, our sovereign, should thus continue standing; deign

but to recline your graceful person upon this sofa, which will burst with vexation if it have not the honour to receive you."

She placed him on the pretended sofa, which, quicker than lightning, flew up all at once. The rest of the women, having aptly conceived her design, sprang naked from the bath and plied the swing with such unmerciful jerks that it swept through the whole compass of a very lofty dome, and took from the poor victim all power of respiration. Sometimes his feet razed the surface of the water; and, at others, the skylight almost flattened his nose . . .

The sultanas and their slaves, stimulated by these pleasantries, persevered at the swing with such unremitted assiduity, that at length the cord which had secured it snapped suddenly asunder; and Bababalouk fell, floundering like a turtle, to the bottom of the bath.

WILLIAM BECKFORD, *Vathek*

All Clear!

Odysseus saw the sirens; they were charming,
Blonde, with snub breasts and little neat posteriors,
But could not take his mind off the alarming
Weather report, his mutineers in irons,
The radio failing; it was bloody serious.
In twenty minutes he forgot the sirens.

JOHN MANIFOLD, *The Sirens*

Venus Anadyomene

At the end of the dark and narrow box alley was a fountain splashing and sparkling in the sunlight. Its drops fell in a shower of jewels on water-lilies, golden and rose-pink like the clouds of sunrise that still adorned the sky. Two swans floating on its basin appeared as spirits from another world in their dazzling whiteness, their marvellous indifference to the marvel that stood before them. For on the edge of the fountain stood a nymph newly risen from its waters, and glittering so that every melting curve and perfect outline of her body seemed modelled in pearl and silver.

Her head was flung back, her face upturned, but Beaux Airs could not see it, for she held her arms outstretched before it as if rapt in ecstatic adoration of the beneficent sun that had called forth this garden, its flowers, its creatures and herself, into the warmth and light and life of the summer morning.

MARGARET IRWIN, "*Where Beauty Lies*"

Submarine Attack

From that swimming-pool at the top of the donjon the view was prodigious. Floating on the translucent water, one had only to turn one's head to see, between the battlement, successive vistas of plain and mountain, of green and tawny and violet and faint blue. One floated, one looked, and one thought, that is, if one were Jeremy Pordage, of that tower in *Epipsychidion*, that tower with its chambers

> *Looking towards the golden Eastern air*
> *And level with the living winds.*

Not so, however, if one were Miss Virginia Maunciple. Virginia neither floated, nor looked, nor thought of *Epipsychidion*, but took another sip of whisky and soda, climbed to the highest platform of the diving-tower, spread her arms, plunged, glided under water and, coming up immediately beneath the unsuspecting Pordage, caught him by the belt of his bathing-pants and pulled him under.

"You asked for it," she said, as he came up again, gasping and spluttering, to the surface, "lying there without moving, like a silly old Buddha." She smiled at him with an entirely good-natured contempt . . .

Miss Maunciple stretched out a hand and patted the bald patch at the top of Jeremy's head. "Boy," she said, "does it shine. Talk of billiard-balls. I know what I shall call you: Ivory. Good-bye, Ivory." She turned, swam to the ladder, climbed out, walked to the table on which the bottles and glasses were standing, drank the rest of her whisky and soda, then went and sat down on the edge of the couch on which, in black spectacles and bathing-drawers, Mr. Stoyte was taking his sun-bath.

ALDOUS HUXLEY, *After Many a Summer*

Bathing Beauty

Beauty sat bathing by a spring
Where fairest shades did hide her;
The winds blew calm, the birds did sing,
The cool streams ran beside her.
My wanton thoughts enticed mine eye
To see what was forbidden:
But better memory said, fie!
So vain desire was chidden.
Hey nonny, nonny.

ANTHONY MUNDAY, *England's Helicon*, 1600

LOADED WAIN

The boy was smothered in tousled clouds of hay

by CRICHTON PORTEOUS

"BACK yer!"

Bonnie, the bay Shire, sluthered her hoofs, moving her great rounded rump slightly leftward, obedient to the light pressure on her flank from the young man's palm. Reaching the hanging cart leg, he pulled the shaft down, as he did so tugging briefly on the bit with his left hand to make the horse lean a little forward for the saddle-chain to chink into its groove. While he hastily fastened the hame-chains, belly-band, and breeching, the horse stood docile, with pendulous lower lip.

The wheels struck the cobbles of the yard with a metallic clatter which the empty cart amplified. Between the old red buildings dreaming in the sunshine, the vehicle rolled with a rumble suggestive of distant thunder. On the packed earth of the lane under the drowsy elms, it ran silently again, as if suddenly anxious not to disturb them. Little pennons of hay hung moveless from the lower branches. On the right-hand gate-stump was more hay—a tuft caught in a splinter. Through the open gate-place pressed wheel tracks shone as if the dark earth had been black-leaded.

Three men were in the field. The farmer was short and broad, his round face glowing like a traffic sign beneath a floppy white linen hat. His shoulders and biceps bulged his blue shirt till it looked as though it might split. His companion was of the same height, but lean, a dark oak colour, still wearing pullover and waistcoat. The third man was driving a horse-rake, working the hay into wind-rows which at a distance appeared to be crawling over the field like enormous fluffy bluey-green caterpillars. This man was grey with an age-lag in his stoop as he reached for the long handle which raised the tines and released the combings. Up to this day he had been the sole teamsman, but now the youth had superseded him.

With a short wave the farmer indicated the far end and, hoisting his pikel over his shoulder, began to trudge there with the dark labourer. Half the field had been cleared and was marked with wheel lines, and with faint yellowy circles where

hay lumps had stood. The mare made a brushing sound through the stubble-grass. The cart was manœuvred between two windrows like a shuttle into a slot.

" Get up," muttered the farmer, made laconic by the heat.

" I've never loaded before," confessed the youth, doubtfully skinning his smock-jacket off and hanging it on a hame point.

" Get up," repeated the farmer, but with a slight grin.

" Dunna let it fall off; we conna lift it aw twice," said the labourer, also grinning.

The youth climbed the red wheel and swung breeched legs over the hay-wing. One on either side, the men hefted up great tousled clouds of hay and tossed them into the well. Instantly the youth was smothered, entangled in a heated grey-blue mesh.

Before he fought clear, more hay was tumbled on him, and he guessed it was a joke. Unless he got the better of them he would never hear the last of it. He clawed and flung his weight on the hay, and the springy mass sank like froth. He ducked and let more hay slip from his shoulders and knelt upon it, kneading it. The next lot he dodged, jumping on it. Seeds or dust in his nostrils made him sneeze, and he saw the boss's shining face grinning up from beneath another forkful.

" Oh no," he shouted, excited, side-stepping.

" What, hast come up for the third time? " asked the labourer jovially from the other side.

Now the joke was over, the well full, and serious building began. The men lifted the hay approximately in turn, rhythmically, giving him just time to receive and place each forkful before the next one came. He bundled each load in his arms into a rough loose ball, crushing it into place under his knees, first far out on the wings to make his corners firm, as he had seen other men do. Then each armful overlapping the previous one to hold it in place, after the manner of a man laying slates.

"'Owd yer! " yelled the farmer hoarsely, and the cart rocked twenty paces forward.

At last the first round was complete, the whole framework hidden, and the second round begun.

" How's that? " he asked anxiously, raising a corner.

" Non so bad; keep it out," grunted the farmer, his bulging cheeks plastered with hay bits.

Gradually the load rose, as soft as moss. The youth's knees sank in, and wherever he worked he was in a nest, with the hay making a ridge all round. He dared not move too near the edge for fear of slipping off, and he prayed that none of the hay might slip off either. In his anxiety he kept the rounds in too far and

heard the farmer call again, " Keep it out; keep it out, or you'll non get but a spoonful on."

The great rough wads now rolled in onto him. He trod them down in the centre as hard as he could to bind the load as he had been told to. The increasing height made the reaching slower. At last he could cope with them, and when the boss yelled, "'Owd yer! " he had time to kneel up and notice on a level with him the tops of the trees round the field. The hay was warm and spongy and seemed to draw the heat, so that it burnt on his back, as if he were lifted close to the sun. When the cart stopped, he balanced on his feet and looked down on the field and the reachers with a satisfying sense of mastery.

" Looks ta me it's got bellyache," said the labourer, winking.

" Ay, looks as if it's had as much as it can stand without gettin' drunk an' disorderly," agreed the farmer. Two more forkfuls . . .

When the load was trodden down, the youth sat on the front edge and let himself slide, like a boy tobogganing. Bonnie appeared almost smothered up to the head, but the youth's weight made a groove and his boots struck with a metallic click on the saddle. He jumped down, eager to see what the load looked like, and was shocked by its shapelessness. It looked like a bundle; and it was not very high, either.

" It's back-heavy, but you'll do better with practice," said the farmer, not unkindly. " Stand it in the empty bay and bring the black cart."

" Here's a fork ta 'owd it on wi'," said the labourer.

The youth took the bit and plodded gloomily to the gate. Both stumps plucked a handful this time, the load was so bulgy; and as it rolled by, the hedges snatched tufts and long frayed pieces. Fortunately no one was in sight at the house, and he hurried Bonnie over the cobbles, thankful to hide the load in the stack-yard. The fewer that saw it the better!

Several bays of the Dutch barn were full, the hay standing straight up to the arched roof in yellowy-green cliffs. Here was a bay half full, with just space between the barn uprights to back the load beside it. Bonnie manœuvred carefully with broad-planted hoofs, then sat back obediently on the breeching.

The wheels rolled easily down the slight incline to where years of drippings had washed a shallow channel directly under the eaves. But the little rise beyond was an obstruction, a scotch. The wheels stopped, the shafts rose, and before the carter had realized the cause, the horse was clawing powerlessly, her fore-feet dangling. The load, back-heavy before, had now been given a tilt that had quite upset its equilibrium. Instinctively he swung on the shaft—swung on it double-handed—and the load came

down slowly, unwilling, till the Shire's hoofs touched earth again.

He shouted, but the horse was helpless, with no grip, most of her weight held up by the belly-band. She stood quivering, unable to understand, afraid. The youth let his feet touch, and immediately the shaft rose, so that he swung on instantly again, also afraid. The load had become a pair of scales, the wheels merely a fulcrum; he and Bonnie could just balance the load. If he let go, Bonnie would be swung aloft, and perhaps break her back.

Sweat globules, like soda-water bubbles, broke out on his brow. The sparrows, unable to stay away from the hay seeds, flew down and pecked, unembarrassed by his boots. The sun seemed to pulse like steam between the tall stacks. What a predicament to add to the ridiculousness of his load! So simple, and yet so insurmountable. All he could do was shout.

The sparrows squirted upward like feathered spray. A black cat, which had been silently stalking them, sprang just too late and flicked her tail in annoyance. The cry boomed in the corrugated concave roof; then silence fell like a snuffer. A second shout had less effect, for the sparrows had not yet ventured back. Fear became more potent, making his heart throb and his arms ache. The men in the field were too far away, and his cries apparently would not reach over the stacks. Could he hang on till his absence roused questionings and someone came to look?

"Help, help!" he shouted frenziedly, and the echo in the metal roof mocked him. Then a quick patter sounded from the stack end, and Emily, the black-haired, apple-cheeked maid, peered nervously round, as if ready to flee. Hesitancy gave way to curiosity, and she advanced light-footed, thinking it a joke.

"Weigh on," he implored, his eyes helping his speech.

After the least pause, plump and practical, she set her hands on the other shaft. Relieved considerably from the upward lift, Bonnie took heart and, obedient to the youth's cry, swayed leftward and forward, working the off wheel out of the rut with a levering pull. A backward push sent the near wheel up the slope, and the load went diagonally safely into the bay.

"Hold her," panted the youth, ducking to adjust the back leg. When he came from under the cart he was red but happy.

"Don't split," he pleaded. She did not answer, running abruptly and swiftly away, but from the gate she threw a kiss.

He rapidly unhooked Bonnie from the standing load and led her to the black cart. They went back to the field at a trot.

★ ★ ★

The only thing to do with the English upper class is to marry into it.
PHILIP TOYNBEE, *Friends Apart*

"The Quiet City" is Caryl Brahms' delightful forthcoming novel—a gem of Edwardian entertainment that sparkles with the gaiety and humour of her earlier work. Argosy offers a foretaste of this mischievously witty new book. All the pomp and circumstance—and enchanting detail—of Grete Lyttletoun, a vast country house, are interlaced with an intriguingly romantic theme that culminates in the scintillating elegance of Lady Sanctuary Linneage's coming-out ball.

GRETE LYTTLETOUN

by CARYL BRAHMS

THAT year, the big house sailed the skies of the village of Christmas Meagrefold more serenely than ever before. Or so it seems, looking back.

Impossible to visualize the Maltravers Meadows without that quiet city of butter-coloured stone. No solid stately mass at the start of the green slope's gentle swell; no dark serration where the towers and turrets tilt. No hot-houses for Her Ladyship's inspection. No stables for His Lordship's language. Nothing of GRETE LYTTLETOUN (station: *Shallow*). Nothing!

Only, well, fields. Fields, and the feel of the rising sap.

A quiet city. Ah, but a balloon's-eye view would soon give the lie to that! Well, fairly soon.

For His Lordship would be down, this year, for Easter. Preparations were in full swing.

They had re-gilded the tops of the spikes of the Antioch Gates and the coronet upon the great lamp in the colonnade—an upstart eighteenth-century addition to visible history.

Soon the Family would be down. Soon the windows would blaze with light. Soon Royalty would be expected.

But for the moment, only Her Ladyship, the Old 'Un, and their little Lord- and Ladyships, and Lady Sanctuary Linneage, the eldest, who wouldn't be with us much longer, but was for London and some suitable Lord, bless her soft voice and pretty manners—only, in short, a mere handful of Family—and a handful they were, at that! For only the very old and the young stay in the country all the year round.

Carry your lamp along the mirrored corridor, trying not to hurry, not to look over your apprehensive shoulder for fear of seeing "Them." Knock at a door in Dowagers' Row where rattlebone relicts cough life away. Try not to tremble when a dry voice with a crackle of leaves and the east wind in it bids you come in.

Here Florence Lady Mortefino is having a cosy chat with her grand-daughter.

" So you're coming out this season? Well, you've got the bones for it." The old lady with the face like a gallant clown inspected them. " The bones of the Courvoisins—good bones—*My* bones—none better! "

" Yes, Grand'mère." Lady Sanctuary Linneage endeavoured to tuck in her stomach. It was uncomfortable but she had been trained to it.

" Of course," continued old Lady Mortefino, " you haven't the interesting pallor that I had at your age. Nor the bosom "—here poor Sancta did her best to puff her chest out, but it wasn't any use—" nor my Presence."

Sanctuary Linneage bowed her head. She was beaten and she knew it.

" But I dare say you'll find yourself a man, as men go these days." There was a fine curl to the old lady's lips. " And when you find 'im, after 'im—and get 'im—get 'im," the old lady emphasized, " and mind you let him think it's he who's after you, or you won't. D'you take me? "

" Yes, Grand'mère," said Sanctuary.

" Marry in your first season. The Courvoisins always marry in their first season."

" Yes, Grand'mère."

" I married in my first season," said the old lady, " naturally."

" Yes, Grand'mère."

" And see to it—now this is important—that from then on, if not before, you never lose a battle. Always remember, Sanctuary, that when you lose your first battle, then you lose your last! Yield not an inch—let the other side give way. Face the foe squarely and refuse to budge."

" But what if it isn't a foe? What if it's a friend—someone you trust, someone who may know better than you? " Was there a hint of special pleading here? The old lady ignored it.

" You will be wrong, but you will not be beaten. The Courvoisins have often been wrong. They have never been beaten." The old lady dug her chin into the air.

But Sanctuary showed no signs of relinquishing. She was a true Courvoisin. Or would be, when Florence Lady Mortefino had done with her. Now she, too, dug her chin in the air.

" But what about the other person's point of view? " she persisted. " He frequently has one."

" Tcha! " The cracked voice held more than a flick of the east wind. " Anyone else's point of view is weakness! Silly, modern, wishy-washy weakness, and prejudice! " Florence Mortefino pointed a diamond-decked talon. " How do you suppose," she said, " the family got rid of Anne Boleyn?—not by considering her point of view. She tried to cut the Courvoisins off from the King's favour. They saw to it that the King's favour was removed—and with it her head."

" Oh? " said Sancta. " It didn't put it that way in the history books."

" Nevertheless, that was the truth of the matter. Anyone can write a history book—the Courvoisins *are history*."

" And the Linneages," said Sancta, loyally.

The old lady considered this. " After the Conquest," she conceded. " Where was I? "

" Not budging," said Sancta, but she said it to herself.

" Ah yes. Never concede a point. A Courvoisin does not conciliate. Or treat—except in terms of total victory. Take up your stand. Face 'em—and down 'em. Give battle."

" Papa conciliates a few people," Sancta observed. " And—and you! "

" Tcha! Your father's a fool, child! Hasn't the strength of mind to cut off his nose to spite his face—and a Linneage nose at that! My daughter married beneath her—I told her so, at the time."

" Mother? " said Sanctuary Linneage. " Oh."

" For ever in the family way! Always having to stay down in the country! Interesting condition. Interesting to whom? Not to your husband, once you have given him his son. Can you blame the poor wretch if he goes up to town for distraction? Tcha! " said the old lady. " Where were we, child? Where were we? "

" Giving battle . . ."

" Ha! So we were . . . Fight 'em! Fight 'em with all you've got—with all you're made of. And when the victory's won put it behind you. Forget it. But remember—and this is the most important thing of all—never admit the *possibility* of defeat. For a Courvoisin, defeat does not exist. Have I made myself clear? "

" Yes, Grand'mère," said Sanctuary. She looked depressed.

Silence. Old Lady Mortefino was now ready for a change to some other sympathetic topic of conversation. She signified it with a rap of her stick. The two Courvoisins conversed politely until it was time for Sanctuary's release, her daily visit to her grandmother safely over.

But, as she reached the door, the old lady's stick thumped once again. Not that Florence Mortefino needed this implement for walking, but rather to lend her observations its helpful emphasis.

" And remember, gal, no nonsense before the wedding night. None! "

" No, Grand'mère," said the docile girl.

But once outside on the landing, she tilted a puzzled head at herself in the great hanging mirror, that for three generations had reflected high Courvoisin heads, their imperious, aquiline noses, their firm, firm mouths.

" No nonsense till the wedding night," she cautioned the current, dim green Courvoisin.

She blushed.

Open the windows—let the high bird sing among the rose

chintzes of the South Wing Saloon; let the sun stream into Her Ladyship's sanctum; let the shimmer of green shine on the spring-pale walls of Their Ladyships' former schoolroom.

The two young ladies, Sanctuary and Alexandrina, her sister next in age, stand in a dreaming trance, one at the window looking out over the sweep of the park, always the same yet different; the other, the younger, the very medal of her sister Sanctuary, only more faintly stamped, surveying her pale pink face in the schoolroom mirror—still no dimples—heigh-ho!

These two elder Linneage girls had grown alike, had lessons alike, learnt to ride together, graduated to dinner with the grown-ups on those rare occasions when no guests were present. Even dressed alike. And now, Sanctuary was about to take a step—would inevitably leave her younger sister behind; behind in the empty schoolroom with the old Kate Greenaway wallpaper, depicting the months—December on skates, a hat sailing on the high winds of March, an armful of June roses, November's bonfire in brick-red flames—nursery figures of faded fun.

For Sancta was to be allowed magnolias in her hair at her coming-out party, while Alex was still to be in bows. Heigh-ho!

And so, like a restive colt, impatient of snaffle, Alexandrina tossed her head and spoke: "I wouldn't be you, Sancta, going to that old London just when the country's at its best!" she said falsely—defensively.

"You'll leave Lyttletoun in summer," said her sister calmly, quite undeceived, "when it's your turn. And," she added, her face warming, for she was the generous one, "you'll have a lovely time, Alex, a much better time than I—you're so spirited," she reminded the disconsolate lass.

Alexandrina, momentarily placated, crossed to the window and placed her arm round her sister's waist.

And so the sisters stood, looking out over the park, much as Sargent had painted them, except that in the painting the park lay behind the dreaming sisters. The Cardinal's Glade (set in its curl of shrubs, on its puffed green cloud of a bank), spreading and rising in little—or was that the Gainsborough canvas in the Long Gallery of two bygone Linneage girls? The painters and the generations merge.

"Look," cried Alex, the spirited one, "do you see? Just coming over the Oudenarde Bridge . . ."

There, in the distance, a speck turned into a man on horseback—first, any man; then, one particular man.

"It's the new chestnut," said Alex.

"It's Osbert," thought Sancta; a name with a difference. A fellow-feeling for tennis had first drawn them together.

"Osbert!" called Alex. "Osbert Upjohn! Coo-ee!" She leaned from the window and waved. The dear girl had such spirit!

The man on the horse waved back; they both had the right sort of looks, thought Sanctuary, as the Lyttletoun Agent raised his

whip in salute, and the new chestnut checked and slid, sidled and danced a little.

How handsome the Linneage girls are growing, the man thought, particularly Sancta—she's for a raving beauty! "Steady, old lady," he whispered to the palpitating mare, "take it easy, lass."

And Sanctuary, who first had paled, and then had flushed, and now was master of her countenance, smiled down at him from behind her headlong sister; a steady-eyed smile.

A Courvoisin had seen the man she loved.

But she did not, as yet, admit or even entirely realize this.

"They say," said her sister, withdrawing into the room, as the chestnut pranced off, "they say in the village that Osbert Upjohn is not happy with his wife."

"They say a lot of things, you may be sure," said Sancta quickly. "You'd think they had nothing better to do than talk in the village! But, you know, I rather like Osbert . . ."

No blinking it, the 3.15 is going to be late this afternoon; later, that is, than usual. For here it is 4.59 by the clock on Shallow up-train platform (kept three minutes fast to the stiff old tick), and she not signalled yet—not even drawn out of Fairingford Junction; five and a quarter miles from Fairingford to Shallow as the coach rolls—two and a bit by balloon.

Yet already Mr. Sheepshanks, the station-master, had donned his top hat. Soon he would be rolling down his shirt-sleeves.

For His Lordship is arriving for Easter.

Some time ago, the carriages had come clattering into the station yard. First the dogcart, with a yelling hoard of little nobles. Next came the station brake to pick up the luggage, under the personal eye of Miss Simple, Her Ladyship's maid, and Mr. Billinghurst, His Lordship's man.

Next, the gig with the two elder young Ladyships, the younger at the reins, as usual, and a yapping embranglement of dogs anywhere but at heel.

And last, His Lordship's brougham,

And each conveyance sanctified by a coronet.

"Oh, here he comes!" The high, light voice was Lady Sanctuary's. And having cried out impulsively, that one bit her lips. For, oddly enough, she did not mean her father in the 3.15 still chugging through Little Hurdles, but rather Captain Upjohn, who had come swinging onto the platform through the gate marked *Exit*, rather expecting to be late.

For some reason of her own, she had changed from the grey Norfolk jacket and scarlet tam-o-shanter—the sisters' morning uniform; she, Sanctuary, who had never before chafed at the sisterly fusion of identity, or minded being: "The Linneage Girls." It was Alexandrina who still had the younger sister's longing to be just like the elder. But there was a reason why, this spring afternoon, Sancta sought only to be herself in a sailor suit and a boater. And there can be little doubt that now the

reason was standing hatless before her in the pale, cool sunshine, a yapping of welcoming dogs jumping up at him.

Alexandrina was the first to speak: "Where's Mrs. Ossie?" she asked. "Not ill again, I hope?" For Mrs. Ossie enjoyed poor health; a dreary sort of enjoyment!

"Yes," said Osbert Upjohn, looking at Sanctuary, "I mean, no, I mean . . ."

Laughter broke the ice between them. And it was not long before he drew Sanctuary down the platform to stroll a length or so with him.

"So you're for London," he said a little sadly.

"Yes," said Sanctuary. "Yes, indeed! And Alexandrina pities me for it!"

"And you? Do you want to go to London this wonderful country weather?"

"I thought I did—but somehow, now that it's got so near . . ."

"You'll have a high old time up there, don't worry!"

"Shall I?" Her voice sounded flat and very young.

"A high old time! And you'll come back a stranger—a fearful swell—speaking an alien, fashionable jargon. We needn't expect to understand a word you say!"

"Oh, as to that, we Courvoisins do not change much, really!"

They had come to the edge of the platform. They stood and looked down the line. There was only the song of the wires.

Then he turned to her, suddenly serious: "Don't let them change you too much—those new impressions, new influences, new friends. Stay—always—just as you are—just as I see you at this moment. I don't know how I could bear it, if you were to come back to me a stranger."

He should never have said it. For now her gaze was level as her voice: "The Courvoisins do not change," she said.

And now, in a plume of smoke and a promise of thunder, the 3.15 can be seen at the curve of the line, bringing His Lordship home for Easter.

"Afternoon, Sheepshanks. Ah, Upjohn! Well, David! Well, Sancta! And Alexandrina! Ugh, brats! *Good* to be home again! How's your Mother?"

In a shower of golden half-sovereigns the Marquis of Linneage had come down for Easter.

But, already, the damage was done.

And there stood GRETE LYTTLETOUN, just as it did in the old ballad, when the homecoming cavalcade trundled round Three-Tree Corner. A quiet city, cream and grey and brick, dusted with gold; coloured like a meerschaum, ripe with age; sailing the deep green world.

It was Lyttletoun. It was home. It was repose. Unless, of course, it was ceaseless vigilance, ceaseless activity. It all depended on your station in life.

The Linneages had ever been fortunate builders; peace blessed their labours.

They held with Henry Wotton that the end is to build well: *Well-building hath three Conditions: Commodity, Firmeness, and Delight.* Who does not enjoy the beauty of old brick, old stone, old walls?

" You will open the ball with His Highness."

" Yes, Grand'mère."

" But you need set no great store by that. His Highness is close to the throne. He will be for a bride of the Blood Royal, no doubt."

" Yes, Grand'mère."

" Therefore be friendly—but not free."

" No, Grand'mère."

" Now, let me see . . . Montmerioneth is taking you in to supper, of course? "

" But, Grand'mère, Monty's so dull! "

" Dull, without doubt—but suitable. Dull, eh? Well, so was his Grandfather. Dull? Well, that is as it may be. Nevertheless, you will save the supper dance for him, grand-daughter."

" But I have already promised the supper dance to . . . to somebody else."

" What's that you say? Don't mutter, girl. Do I mutter and hang my head? Speak out, as I do! "

" I have given my promise."

" Your promise! Tcha! Your piecrust! "

" But, Grand'mère . . ."

However, the old Courvoisin overrode the young Courvoisin's protests with practised ease, and the lively thunder of her stick.

" You will keep the supper dance—d'ye hear me? D'ye hear? —for Anastasia's boy—Anastasia Carfax and Charlemagne. At school with his mother. Came out together. Never out of one another's London houses when first we were married. Anastasia is a FitzEthelred, child. Never forget it. She's a FitzEthelred—if *Families* exist in heaven, which I don't for a moment doubt. It's a fine family, that. A great family. A proud family. An excellent family to marry into. A good family to breed from. Consider it, girl."

" But Monty's adenoidal, Grand'mère! Why, his mouth hangs open like—like a shrimping-net! "

" Brat, hold your tongue! " Really, these Linneages! It must be the scullion in them!

Like a dowager looking her handsome best now that dignity is all that is left of impudence, GRETE LYTTLETOUN brought out her richest jewels, that spring, and wore her diamonds with a difference. For the house had been happily wed to its surroundings for centuries—a lasting love-match between landscape and stone.

That spring—was it the spring of 1905 or 1907? Late spring or early summer? Time and the seasons merge: there were so many lingering afternoons, so many sun-splashed mornings, in the old days! One week is very like another in the country, and flower gardens all smell much the sweet same on warm night air . . .

" Only imagine, Sancta," the speaker was Alexandrina, sitting with her elder sister in their favourite Folly, the Morning Post spread on the bench beside her, while the white lilac waves its plumes above them and the syringa shakes its petals on their shoulders, " only imagine—Mr. Sargent's portrait of Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth was bought in at twelve hundred pounds! What do you think we should fetch? "

" To talk of money is quite dreadfully vulgar," observed the elder sister improvingly.

For those were the days when Linneages had still no need to throw open the gardens to the public—except for the Lyttletoun Pageant, when the proceeds went to the Medical Aid Association—and no living soul could buy, with a piece of silver (or two, come to that, on a five-shilling day), their way into the big house, into the GRETE LYTTLETOUN of the old ballad:

O, waly, waly was her mouth
And snowy bane her cheeks,
Wen shee luked up to Lyttletoun
Wherefrom his rede blude dreips.

" But money is important, Sancta," said Alexandrina stubbornly. " Look at the Upjohns! I bet they'd get on a lot better if they were what Grannie Linneage calls ' moneyed.' But Osbert's only got his pay, and look at Agnes—never a new dress! "

" Oh, I do think you're lucky, Sanctuary," she said. " Shall you see the three Hamlets—Tree, Martin Harvey, and H. B. Irving? " Alexandrina reeled the gloomy Danes off pat.

But Sanctuary ignored them.

" Is no one playing Romeo? " she asked. For she had been seeing herself on that balcony of late.

" Oh dear, I wish . . . I do wish . . ." No need to finish that sentence!

" I wish you were coming to London, too," said the elder sister, a kind girl at heart.

Osbert, Osbert, wherefore art thou Osbert?

On the eve of Lady Sanctuary's coming-out ball, the big house fairly bulged with gentry—and there on the long oaken trestle covered with snowy linen, an old-fashioned tea was spread.

Can you recall the paraphernalia of plates of leaf-thin bread and butter, of pâtisseries, toast, crumpets, and of muffins?

Do you remember the glittering accoutrements? The silver trays, the silver urn, or samovar, the silver-plated etnas, the silver sugar-bowls, the silver cream-jugs, milk-jugs, and the several silver teapots? The flowered china—delicate plates, the gold-tipped, leaf-fine rims of shallow cups, scalloped to make elegant tea-drinking easy—if you could call the china brew that tastes of kipper, yet is somehow thin, polite, by so proper a name as tea? That grey-green draught that wouldn't have the strength to stem a head-ache!

Her Ladyship, the Marchioness, was there: wearing a tea-gown. Something lacy and loose to hide the progress of her interesting condition—giving birth caused far more interest up at the big house than it did in our village, down in Christmas Meagrefold, where it seemed to come more natural-like. For one thing, there were sure to be the bells, which Mr. Tingey and his hearties rang in dutiful, jangling, somewhat muddled peals, to greet the happy morn!

Besides, those were the days when any lady worthy the title changed for tea—and then, again, for dinner—right down to her stays. Sixteen toilettes for a long week-end.

Sanctuary and Alexandrina were at hand to lend Mamma their daughterly support; both of them looking their best, dear girls, in their cloud-like, white muslin afternoon blouses and their dark, their full, their down-to-ankle skirts, braided in squirls. The Courvoisins had always worn their clothes well, since the days of wimples.

And Sanctuary seemed somewhere in a dream. Not so young Alexandrina, chattering away! In particular, she was chatting away to Captain Upjohn, the Lyttletoun Agent, who had that ailing wife, poor thing!

At length, sustained by buttered toast, the guests dispersed to their rooms, there to scribble, " Arrived safely and found all well," on coroneted writing-paper, or on the dashing backs of Gaiety Girls, before putting on their pink, their blue, their mauve, their eau-de-nil, and flitting down to dinner.

The Twelfth Marchioness, having changed out of her tea-gown into something equally amorphous, heavily betook her swollen self down the many corridors that led to her mother's apartments, and as she went her careful way, she frowned a little. For she took with her not only filial affection and long-seated fear, but a problem: " Mamma," she said, the peck on the cheek safely negotiated, " I really don't know what to do about Alexandrina."

Old Lady Mortefino licked her lips. " Tcha," she remarked with venom and pleasure. " Never did know what to do with your girls, did you, Maud? Got no sense yourself. How can you expect them to show any, eh? . . . Eh? "

The daughter winced away from the look of loathing in the mother's beady eyes. How could Mamma be so unkind? And she in her condition.

" Alex is such a spirited girl," she sighed.

" Well, Maud, what's wrong with spirit? The Courvoisins have spirit. I have spirit."

" You have, Mamma! " The Twelfth Marchioness sighed a timid, envious sigh.

" You never had any spirit. Take after your Father. Can't think how I ever came to have a daughter like you. Look at your Cousin Aggie, married an Earl, a Yankee, and a Duke—and had a son by each of 'em. Shows great strength of character. And each time married into her tiara! Well," Lady Mortefino returned

from the pleasing recollection of her niece's prowess, " what's the matter now? What's wrong this time? "

" Alexandrina is growing up too quickly."

" You spoil the chit," said the old lady. " Send her to me. I'll deal with her this time." Her pale eyes blazed. Her nostrils dilated. For there is nothing a Courvoisin likes better than a battle. And there was no fight in the world like a fight with another Courvoisin!

A gong boomed in the bowels. The Twelfth Marchioness rose to go. It would never do to keep her butler waiting! Besides, there were her guests . . .

And now, from every room in every wing, brightly coloured butterflies fled down the staircases. And there were more stairs in Lyttletoun, more levels to be reconciled, than there were stars in the heavens!

All these levels, between the Norman way of life and the Edwardian, had to be reconciled with flights of steps. And Linneages have played around with staircases, with stone and oaken levels, through the centuries.

So that, on her way to obey Grand'mère's summons, Alexandrina, lagging up and down and along, decided that the Golden Staircase of the Afterworld would entirely fail to leave her breathless, for she was a Linneage, and in her father's mansion there were many corridors!

" Aren't you ashamed of yourself, a great girl like you, playing your poor mother up, and she in Her Condition? "

Grand'mère's carved ivory face looked grim. But Alexandrina did not hang her head. In fact, she too dug her chin in the air. And so we have the pair of them, face to face, a fine old Fury and her vernal echo.

" Well? " The voice with the crackle of leaves and the east wind in it lashed out again. " Well, I say! Well, my fine lady! What have you got to say for yourself? Speak up! "

Florence Lady Mortefino grasped her ebony cane more firmly and prepared not to stomach a word her favourite grand-daughter could bring herself to utter in justification of this, her latest crime, the black behaviour of having grown up before her elder sister.

There was silence in the overcrowded room.

" Have I to remind you yet again that we do not sulk, we Courvoisins? " Here Florence Mortefino cued her cane in for its routine obligato of wrath, played pizzicato—crescendo to fortissimo. " Sulking, I say, is one of your upstart, scullion, Linneage tricks! No more of it, no more of it, I say! "

" The Linneages are more civilized than those old Courvoisins! " Alexandrina, stung, had thrown the challenge at her grandmother with such effect that the old lady clutched her heart.

" Say that again," she gasped. Old hearts were not for thumping like black, cantankerous canes. " Say that again," she dared this chip of an ancient block. " Say that again," she challenged in a hard-fought whisper.

Alexandrina, impulsive girl, stubbed an already repentant toe, "Sorry, Grand'mère," she said. " I didn't mean to be impertinent."

" Faugh! " the old voice lashed out at her, as the icy, ageless wind lashes the sapling. " Sorry, be damned! A weakling Linneage trick! *Sorry!* A Courvoisin," she rasped, " does not apologize—takes up a stand—maintains it. Don't let me hear anyone of my own blood apologize again—even to me! To be wrong is right enough. But to admit that you are wrong—that's wrong! The Courvoisins keep face! D'ye take me? "

Alexandrina threw back her gallant head. " I see, now, what a sorry thing it is to say I'm sorry, Grand'mère chérie! "

Thus, with great charm—" the charm of the Linneages "—did this young Courvoisin parry the other Courvoisin and win the day!

The romantic Alexandrina was well up in her Hamlet. " And when you are desirous to be blessed, I'll blessing beg of you," she murmured dreamily. She caught sight of her grandmother's expression.

" Shakespeare," she said in self-defence.

But the old lady was not to be intimidated by that.

Whosoever he may have been
Shakespeare was not a Courvoisin,

she misquoted from the jingle that had been chanted mockingly down the ages in the family nurseries.

" Come here, Grand-daughter," the loaded talon beckoned. " I know well enough what it means to have a restless spirit. I was a second sister, too, y'know. I, who was born to take the lead—like you, my Jennie wren, like you, Alexandrina. And so you will do, when it's your turn! Till then—mum! Mum, I say. Let your elder sister have her hour! She'll marry an earl and be out of your way, by the end of the season. I've given my instructions. So let there be no more nonsense—let your sister have her soft-voiced whack! But she's not getting my tiara—that she ain't! And do you know who is? "

Alexandrina flushed.

" Not . . . not me? Oh, Grand'mère, do you really mean it? " Her high, light voice was filled with awe. She, all unworthy as she was, wearing the Courvoisin coronet!

The old lady rested her claw on the strong, soft, outstretched palm. " Some day," she said. " Some day. All in good time. Don't vex your mother, brat, and you shall have it. For your soft-voiced sister riles me with her meekness.

" And now, to business! Advance and make your curtsy—Draw a deep breath while I count one, two, three "—The tall black stick counted, too—" Now for it, Courvoisin! Advance—Approach the throne—not bad, but take your time—Walk with authority—walk as though you were come home to Court. Now slowly, *slowly* down, head bent and stomach in, to lay your homage at your monarch's feet. Be dutiful, but not unctuous! Now, slowly, straighten up—Rise and retire—Hold your head high to show a proper pride—pride in your monarch, girl, faith in your-

self. And they will say: *There goes another Courvoisin with God!*"

The Blue Hungarian Band had come down to play for Lady Sanctuary's Coming-Out Dance. How white lilac does bring back those swooning waltzes, bouncing polkas, even today! Great vases of it, every way you turned!

The Ballroom was banked with roses, pink malmaisons, and blue hortensias, early honeysuckle—laid end to end, the smilax would have trailed from Lyttletoun to Longleat! The warm sweet air smelt like the stuff that ladies—real ones—spray on their hair and bodices. Oh, the flash of diamonds, the sheen of tinted satins, the dancing shimmer of sequins, and the tinted clouds of tulle! And what with the swoon of the strings and the snowdrift of shoulders, the rise and fall and sweet, soft parting of the breasts, small wonder ideas came into a fellow's head!

How the dashing coat-tails and the pointed satin slippers, revealed by the caught-up foam of underskirts, did swing and whirl about the amber pool of parquet!

And there, nice and warm by the farther marble fire-place, nice and near to the buffet, nice and not too near to the Blue Hungarian Barn Dance, their Ladyships, the Old 'Uns, sat—not talking, and hadn't been for years, except before the servants, or else at family conclaves—on opposite sides. And with their noble cronies—ancient ladies, with dust in their voices—all of 'em looking as though they'd just come in from the ash-heap! And all of 'em feeling the cold. Diamonds never did keep old folks warm. How palsied hands and tremulous heads did make the light fly from wrists and busts and topknots! But there, age is the catastrophe in store for all of us—or so it seemed in 1905.

Very pretty and pale, Lady Sanctuary, with magnolias in her hair, carried herself, the heroine of the hour, with an inherited distinction and her own easy grace and deep serenity. She had been trained to be natural.

She had duly danced with His Highness. Kept, after all, the supper dance for Anastasia Carfax and Charlemagne's boy, Montmerioneth, a FitzEthelred, just as her grandmother bade her. Danced every dance, appropriately partnered—and yet—and yet . . .

For Osbert Upjohn had only pencilled his name against one of the many items in her pale pink programme—and that a late schottische.

Yet here he was waltzing again with Alexandrina; and with evident enjoyment, bows and all!

It wasn't fair!

Alex hadn't had to disengage herself from him for the supper dance—hadn't had to endure his icy understanding.

And all because of the abysmal Monty! And, of course, this had to happen tonight of all nights and spoil it all!

Aloud she said to her current appropriate partner, "Yes, the floor is nice and springy!" with every appearance of enjoyment.

On sat the chaperones, all along the wall; ladies with pleased

expressions because their frisky lilies had not been left to linger in the shade, with bright strained smiles while rivals set to partners. That is, if they were not ladies with provoked expressions because their clump of wallflower had taken unwilling root in the perennial border.

The débutantes were white flowers, tossing and swaying in the Blue Hungarian air. Their newly-married cousins, pale pink, pale mauve, pale blue, and eau-de-nil flirtatious butterflies—their partners, one another's husbands.

Useless to look for Captain Upjohn's wife in the year-before-last's satin beauté. She was at home, nursing a grievance called " one of her heads."

" Ah, Upjohn, where's the little lady? Not ill again, I trust? " His Lordship asked, without much interest, but with the routine kindness of the Squire.

" She was as right as rain this morning."

Captain Upjohn's explanation to kind inquirers came smoothly enough; for the poor gentleman was accustomed to going to functions accompanied only by a formula.

Agnes was hopeless as a helpmate.

" She was as right as ninepence up to lunchtime," later he told the joyous kid in his Blue Hungarian arms. The child was so gloriously uncomplicated—or so thought the man whose marriage trailed after him like seaweed.

While waiting to be collected for the supper dance by worthy Montmerioneth who was a FitzEthelred, Sanctuary—with a face that momentarily betrayed that new emotion, anguish, her brow puckered in pain—was watching her sister being fairly whirled off her young feet by the man set apart from mankind by reason of her own love for him. And at that moment, the dancers parted and Osbert Upjohn saw her face—knew himself full well to be the reason for the piercing look of sadness that he saw in it.

" Agnes will be as right as cherry-pie by tomorrow," once more he assured that pickle of mischief, young Alex. But he spoke with only half his mind; for between the intermittent clouds of coloured ball-dresses he could see that ass Montmerioneth arriving to claim Sanctuary for supper—profaning her white glove by the confounded fumbling of his own. And her slow, reluctant acknowledgment, as she turned to lead the way to the Colonnade Saloon where supper, dear God, was served!

And Osbert Upjohn cursed the day he was born to bring sadness to the faces of the women he loved—Agnes, poor snuff-coloured soul—she'd be right as apple-sauce tomorrow! And the tobacconist's daughter he'd got in the family way, on leave—what was her silly name? And now, and worst of all, unsullied Sanctuary: shining out for him like a star in the heavens; ripe, now, to be discovered like a pale dog-rose in the hedgerow, fragrant as flowering nicotine at night.

And the coloured company trooped out, watched through the banisters of the dramatic staircase by a wide-eyed gang of infant

Linneages, nodding in on the proceedings from a height like acquiescent morning-glories.

How marvellous to be a grown-up!

On the night of Sanctuary Linneage's party, white flowers shone with gathered radiance everywhere. And the long table!

They had laid out the silver plate and there it gleamed like the path of the moon on the river Lytte when the Maltravers Meadows lay under snow. They had piled high the fruit—the peaches, plums, apricots, nectarines, strawberries, raspberries, pears, grapes, in bloom-blessed pyramids among the flowers the table's length.

In the centre stood the Kaiser's Kind Remembrance—a model of Potsdam in German silver—flimsy stuff—sent to mark royal appreciation after the luncheon of which the Emperor had partaken at Lyttletoun, talking the whole time entirely of himself.

And what with the lobsters, the chicken in aspic, the parish church at Christmas Meagrefold, Lych Gate and all, and all in ice-cream, and all quaffed down with hock-cup in glasses like transparent tulips, ruby and bottle-green; it was quite a time before the Blue Hungarian dancing could be resumed.

The Blue Hungarian Schottische was a spirited affair, designed to set the many-tinted toilettes scudding and spinning across the amber floor, as your irresistible kaleidoscope, rotating, flings its jetons of coloured glass.

But Sanctuary and her Osbert were not for the romp. For he had led her swiftly from the ballroom, blazing with fairly steady electric light, along a marble vestibule with Thornhill's painted ceiling down from which plump cupids peeped from behind their puffy clouds—now butter-coloured with age—into the candle-lit orangery.

" And so," she was saying, " I'm out at last, I suppose! "

" I suppose you must be! Tell me, how does it feel? "

" Much as usual—only rather tight about the toes! " Ruefully the heroine of the hour wiggled one satin slipper, then both. " Still, it does seem to be going quite well, don't you think? "

How lucky straightway to find something easy to say, something pleasant to share! " So far," she added; for in spite of what is to come, Sanctuary had her share of the Linneage caution.

" Don't worry—it's gone with a swing! And, by the by, how well young Alex dances—light as a feather! "

The heroine of the hour frowned and said—quite sharply, for once—" Alexandrina is altogether above herself tonight, I fear. But then she's such a spirited creature. She's far more energy than I! "

" Give her time," said Osbert Upjohn—as though time were theirs for the asking—" she's only a kid, after all !"

And straightway Alexandrina ceased to exist as a menace—poor little younger sister, and her growing pains!

" And . . . and Mrs. Osbert? " It was not without effort that Sanctuary Linneage spoke that name.

" She was as right as frost in February, this morning. She'll be as right as a trivet this time tomorrow! You know, I've often wondered just how right a trivet is! "

They laughed.

Looking back over the years, they seem to stand for an era—an era of laughter so free and frequent that it was quite unimportant, not hard-fought, not something of an event, but natural, like living on your income; being a gentleman; like gracious living, in the days when England was a well-run public school, and kept to its code.

In the ballroom the ancient ladies were weary. Nothing exhausts a head like the constant shaking of it.

However, Florence Mortefino was not for retiring before Hortensia Linneage! Nor would that down-to-earth dowager admit defeat by tottering off ahead of Floe the Foe! So there it was.

And there it had to be, too, for the tremor of old ladies nid-nodding around those two redoubtables.

In the orangery the air is touched with ice. The ice of fear. The ice of sudden shock. The ice that, for an instant, touches the heart and spans all frozen time. The ice that is eternity. And all the candle-flames bend down before the instant desolation of gentle Sanctuary, as, white to the lips, she confronts the man that now she knows she loves: " Away? " she says at length. " Abroad? " She draws a flutter of breath, " You are going to live abroad? " Her high, light voice is deep and hoarse with the effort of speech, it comes a little above a whisper, and it is clear that she does not yet believe the thing that she is repeating, cannot yet, with the numbed emotions, follow the chill fact towards which the mind already has made its leap.

" I have been offered a post in Penang. I am going to take it."

The stroke of the executioner seemed not more final than that plain statement of his.

" . . . And you know, it really isn't a bad one as these things go."

" And—and—Mrs. Upjohn? Is she glad to be going to Penang?"

" Agnes? Oh, I shan't take her. She'll stay on here in England, with her people, in—" he baulked at the word—" in Surbiton." For he had been trapped into marrying beneath him, or so they said in Christmas Meagrefold.

" Your wife isn't going with you? "

" I hardly think so."

" But . . ."

" We've not had much time to discuss it yet, but I have a definite impression that Aggie will stay on here. Of course you know, or if you don't you're about the only one in the County who doesn't seem to know, my marriage went on the rocks after her third mis—disappointment," he edited himself to seemliness before unsullied ears. " By now it's just another of those marriages of inconvenience—to us both."

"You will not miss her, then? Or any of us?"

"Indeed I will—Sancta, you know I will! You know quite well—the reason—I must go."

"Is it—" The candle-flames bent, then straightened as she whispered—"for my sake?"

"For both our sakes, my dear girl, oh my dear! It's the only way—for us both—and I must take it."

"Your mind is quite made up?"

"Irrevocably."

The girl looked him straight in the eyes, drawing a new strength from her innermost being.

"Then I am going to Penang with you," said Sanctuary Honor Augusta Victoria Courvoisin Linneage.

The Ball is over. The very last sweet sweep of Blue Hungarian music has died away in the farthermost echoing corridor.

Drooping butterflies have brushed each other lightly on the cheek and, candle in hand, trail palely off to bed.

Why then are the Linneage girls lingering, each at her lattice, leaning each out over the sill, two healthy English Juliets communing with the first rays of the dawn and catching pneumonia?

Each has her question quite without an answer.

The elder sister is setting in the balance a life empty of Osbert Upjohn against the word *divorce* as Grand'mère Courvoisin would hear the word—somewhere, a bad second, came God's reactions, too.

Alas! It was quite, quite hopeless!

As for the younger sister mooning there, the matter is less complicated—she merely with a glorious single-mindedness seeks to be quite grown up by tomorrow morning at latest!

At length, the elder sister, having gone back over each contest in the selfless field of battle in the orangery which had been—*That she must go with him*—must not.

That without him her life was of no value to herself—that to go with him would be her social ruin and he wasn't going to ruin the life of the woman he loved—he loved!

That this—that that, and that much else, and all repeated time and time again, and nothing conclusive save determination—the determination of a Courvoisin to take her man and take what came. At some great length, then, the elder sister stirred, rose, belted her sky-blue flannel dressing-gown more tightly round, and fled to Alexandrina's room for a sisterly confab. But intending to hold fast to her own secret while groping for the comfort that lies in late companionship.

"Oh, Sancta, it's you! Come in—I have something to tell you." Alexandrina turned back from her mooning. She picked up her rose-pink enamel-backed brush and turned her hair to her sister.

And gentle Sanctuary began to brush. It was an early Sickert.

"Something has happened, Sanctuary—Sancta, I've fallen in love!"

"You've . . ."

"Fallen in love—Sancta, you're tugging—don't!"

"I'm sorry, Baby," the name slipped out, "And the Lucky Man—is he in love with you?"

"Sancta, you're laughing at me! This time it's serious."

"Love, I dare say, always is."

"It's . . . it's appallingly serious! You see, this time . . . He's married! Sancta! You're tugging my hair again!—But, of course, he's madly in love with me—Isn't it thrilling? As a matter of fact, I shall probably elope."

"You will? And with whom, may one ask?"

"Well, it's terribly secret at present—Sancta, you'll have to swear not to tell a living soul. Swear by Mamma's tiara—the one that is not entailed."

"All right. I swear."

"Then it's . . . Osbert Upjohn. What do you think of that!"

The younger sister swung round to enjoy her effect. "So you see, it's quite hopeless!"

The effect she had made was not what she expected.

"Alexandrina, I could spank you!"

The elder sister put down the brush and went suddenly from the room, leaving the younger sister to gaze ruefully after her.

Alone, Alexandrina communed with her reflection, one side in a pigtail, one side loose. Why did nobody ever take her seriously?

Silence was being held.

"Well? What have you got to say for yourself? Speak up!"

What need to state that the stick that was being thumped and the voice of the arctic east belonged to Grand'mère—the silence to Sanctuary?

"Out of the ballroom for over an hour with one man! What can you have been thinking of, gal? What madness possessed you? Sulking, huh? Digging its chin in the air! Tcha! I am waiting, I say, for some explanation of your outrageous behaviour. Say something, chit, I say. D'ye hear me? Speak!"

So Sanctuary sighed.

Grand'mère gave over thundering with her stick and waited—the wrath of God in her aspect.

Then Sanctuary spoke: "I . . . I forgot about time. I forgot about the Dance."

"You forgot! I see!" A rattlesnake would seem less venomous than this ancient lady. "And did you forget, too, Upjohn's a married man? Forget that you are your father's daughter and not some hot little hussy?"

"He is taking a post abroad."

"Abroad! Ha! And not a day too soon, I see. Abroad—well, that's one good thing at least. So forget him, girl, and go after Montmerioneth."

"Where Osbert Upjohn goes, I shall go too."

"Hoity-toity talk, eh? Heroics, eh?"

" I love Osbert Upjohn, and he loves me. He will get his divorce and we shall go together."

" *His divorce!* Sanctuary Linneage, have you no shame? Are you lost to all decency? "

" Yes."

The Iron Duke had not dared defy Florence Mortefino, in his day; but gentle Sanctuary defied her. And there was that in her demeanour, quiet but resolute, that caused the old lady to change her note.

" Come here," she said more gently. " Listen, child. I see you mean what you say—and you'd not be the first Courvoisin to run off with the groom."

Sanctuary allowed the point to pass.

" You're old enough and have been carefully enough taught to know that right is right and wrong is social suicide. But have you considered—have you realized—what it would mean to go off with a married man? "

" Osbert will get his divorce."

" I doubt it—she's the hanging-on kind. And if he does, you will be a déclassée—a very pretty thing for a grand-daughter of mine! And do you know what to be déclassé means? In exile . . . exile . . . exile! " The old voice broke with the sorrow of the word.

" Together," said Sanctuary Linneage in a whisper.

" It would mean that you'd break your father's heart—his eldest girl a déclassée! "

" Father's got Mullibeare—sons matter more to a marquis."

In the face of this great truth, the old lady was silent. So was her stick. But not for long, depend on it, not for long. Then: " It would kill your poor mother," she said, " in Her Condition. And ruin your sister's prospects."

" I must go with him."

" It would mean kissing your hand to Lyttletoun! "

Ha! That hurt!

" *Grete Lyttletoun,*" said Sanctuary. " I know." Her anguish shone in her face. " But I must go with him."

Into the silence the old lady spoke: " Yes," she said unpectedly. " I see that. The Courvoisins do go to the men they love. Nevertheless, Grand-daughter, I am going to save you from yourself in spite of yourself. And it won't be the first time one Courvoisin has done another that service. And I might add, judging from the way your sister was carrying on last night, it won't be the last! But, thank God, one Courvoisin still lives that knows her duty! "

Florence Mortefino rose.

Brittle, but no less awe-inspiring for that, she made her way to the door: " Grand-daughter, I am going to lock you in," she said, went through like a flame, and did.

And now for that fool, her father!

In the matter of fanatical adherence the Civil War came a poor

second to the *conseil de famille* called to deal with rebel Sanctuary.

And she?

She spent what was left to her of her green springtime in a pale silence—calm, unassailable.

Her younger sister, too, was looking pale (though papiers poudrés played their part in this), but was rarely content to be silent. It was the most interesting of griefs, this broken heart of hers.

And even though—on the very night that the gift of yet another daughter was made to his Lordship, *Amen! Amen!*—the news came, too (this time secreted in the bole of an oak-of-the-line of Capability Brown's "Armada Plantacion") that Agnes Upjohn flatly refused to give Osbert his freedom to marry "that prissy Missy, the brazen hussy," Sanctuary seemed not to be in any outward way disturbed. But stayed within her calm, her purpose firm—with or without her lines—to sail with the man she loved, beyond the sunset.

And so, one night that summer, Sanctuary, candle in hand, left for the last time her accustomed room, taking her little leather jewel-case with its touching contents with her—the seed-pearl necklace, string of baby corals, the jangle-bangles, lockets, and the like: and, of course, the rosette won by the Shetland, Jennie, at the Gymkhana.

The old pile groaned as she passed; crackled and sighed as gallery gave on ballroom, ante-room closed into passage, corridor opened into saloon, where chairs held out empty, unhopeful, but ever-faithful arms, then audibly relaxed. Seven deadly staircases of Lyttletoun's famed fifty-two flights (one for each week of the year) squealed out under her foot. The great doors whined and the tall windows rattled.

"Too many stairs and back doors make Thieves and Whores," saith Balthazar Gervier in his *Advice and Counsel to all Builders*, and now we see how right he was.

Praise be, the Lyttletoun dogs and humans, in that order, slept the sounder for such nocturnally orchestrated lullabies.

What's a loose board to a haunted house?

Yet to Sanctuary, stepping with utmost care, each creak was an alarm, and every shadow the blacker and more threatening for her flickering flame, a shape about to interpose between herself and her determined purpose.

On she crept across the perilous polished floors, jetty and shining, under exuberant but yellowing ceilings, past fire-places carved with armorial bearings, beneath the salute of dust-thin shreds of flags, still eloquent of battlefields. Through tapestried walls, and walls close-mossed with Genoese velvets, as green as spring, amber and claret and blue and old "carnacion" pink—all you could see of the walls for Family Portraits.

In a strange way it was the portraits of the Linneage generations, gazing reproachfully down at her, that made the guilty journey hardest for Sanctuary.

For he who peers through candlelight into the dark is indeed more vulnerable than the accusing eyes that watch him from the dark.

And the eyes of the bygone Linneages followed Sanctuary's flight with the strong disapproval of the enduring centuries. Until at last, and in spite of herself and the wild leaping of the candle-flame, she ran—ran from the sloe-eyed, self-contained (school of) Holbeins; the (possibly) Zucchero, sinister behind its ruff; the Spanish-looking (authenticated) Van Dyck; the blest pair of Lelys in their Sutherland frames; Kneller's bare-shouldered Milady, and young Alex and herself by Sargent—the latter by no means the least accusing of the lot.

For the last time, she set down her candlestick on the West Hall table, and in a frenzy, as though the painted fury of her kinsmen had power to hold her back, flung herself on the latch of the State—and so most distant from daily usage—Door, and, as it swung open, ran out beneath that vast high portico, ran down those wide stone steps, and on, on into the park, and did not stay to look back on Lyttletoun, her cradle, till she had reached the Bridge of the Field of the Cloth of Gold, carved out of moonlight, and crossed to the farther side of " leaden Lytte."

Then, for the last time, as she thought, who knew no more of the future than that, at any moment now, a branch would snap, and the man she loved be standing there for ever, she turned her face towards Lyttletoun.

Well might she have murmured: " By the way as I went, to face that princely Pallace which, as I found it ancient, strong, large and magnificent, so it was sweet, delightful and sumptuous and scytuated on a fayre hill."

At the crack of a twig, she flung GRETE LYTTLETOUN over her left shoulder.

The man she loved stepped from the shadow into the path of the moon and instantly she was in his arms, and lost to Lyttletoun for ever.

Let them keep their heap of stones!

★ ★ ★

IN NEXT MONTH'S ARGOSY

H. E. BATES

JOHN PUDNEY

ROBERT SHECKLEY

BERTRAND RUSSELL

WILLIAM P. McGIVERN

HAIL AND FAREWELL

The last night he stayed with her, she discovered his secret

by RAY BRADBURY

BUT of course he was going away, there was nothing else to do, the time was up, the clock had run out, and he was going very far away indeed. His suitcase was packed, his shoes were shined, his hair was brushed, he had expressly washed behind his ears, and it remained only for him to go down the stairs, out of the front door, and up the street to the small-town station where the train would make a stop for him alone. Then Fox Hill, Illinois, would be left far off in his past. And he would go on, perhaps to Iowa, perhaps to Kansas, perhaps even to California; a small boy, twelve years old, with a birth certificate in his case to show he had been born forty-three years ago.

"Willie!" called a voice downstairs.

"Yes!" He hoisted his suitcase. In his mirror he saw a face made of June dandelions and July apples and warm summer-morning milk. There, as always, was his look of the angel and the innocent, which might never, in the years of his life, change.

"Almost time," called the woman's voice.

"All right!" And he went down the stairs, grunting and smiling. In the living-room sat Anna and Steve, their clothes painfully neat.

"Here I am!" cried Willie in the parlour door.

Anna looked as if she was going to cry. "Oh, good lord, you can't really be leaving us, can you, Willie?"

"People are beginning to talk," said Willie quietly. "I've been here three years now. But when people begin to talk, I know it's time to put on my shoes and buy a railway ticket."

"It's all so strange. I don't understand. It's so sudden," Anna said. "Willie, we'll miss you."

"I'll write you every Christmas, really. Don't you write me."

"It's been a great pleasure and satisfaction," said Steve, sitting there, his words the wrong size in his mouth. "It's a shame it had to stop. It's a shame you had to tell us about yourself. It's an awful shame you can't stay on."

"You're the nicest folks I ever had," said Willie, four feet high, in no need of a shave, the sunlight on his face.

And then Anna *did* cry. " Willie, Willie." And she sat down and looked as if she wanted to hold him but was afraid to hold him now; she looked at him with shock and amazement and her hands empty, not knowing what to do with him now.

" It's not easy to go," said Willie. " You get used to things. You want to stay. But it doesn't work. I tried to stay on once after people began to suspect. ' How horrible! ' people said. ' All these years, playing with our innocent children,' they said, ' and us not guessing! Awful! ' they said. And finally I had just to leave town one night. It's not easy. You know darned well how much I love both of you. Thanks for three grand years."

They all went to the front door.

" Willie, where're you going? "

" I don't know. I just start travelling. When I see a town that looks green and nice, I settle in."

" Will you ever come back? "

" Yes," he said earnestly, in his high voice. " In about twenty years it should begin to show in my face. When it does, I'm going to make a grand tour of all the mothers and fathers I've ever had."

They stood on the cool summer verandah, reluctant to say the last words. Steve was looking steadily at an elm. " How many other folks've you stayed with, Willie? How many adoptions? "

Willie worked it out, pleasantly enough. " I guess it's about five towns and five couples and over twenty years gone by since I started my tour."

" Well, we can't complain," said Steve. " Better to've had a son for thirty-six months than none whatever."

" Well," said Willie, and kissed Anna quickly, seized his luggage, and was gone up the street in the green noon light, under the trees, a very young boy, not looking back, running steadily.

The boys were playing on the green park diamond when he came by. He stood a little while among the oak-tree shadows, watching them hurl the white, snowy baseball into the warm summer air, saw the baseball shadow fly like a dark bird over the grass, saw their hands open like mouths to catch this swift piece of summer that now seemed most especially important to hold onto. The boys' voices yelled. The ball landed on the grass near Willie.

Carrying the ball forward from under the shady trees, he thought of the last three years now spent to the penny, and the five years before that, and so on down the line to the years when he was really eleven and twelve and fourteen and to the voices saying: " What's wrong with Willie, missus? " " Mrs. B., is Willie late a-growin'? " " Willie, you smokin' *cigars* lately? "

The echoes died in summer light and colour. His mother's voice: "Willie's twenty-one today!" And a thousand voices saying: "Come back, son, when you're fifteen; *then* maybe we'll give you a job."

He stared at the baseball in his trembling hand, as if it were his life, an interminable ball of years strung round and round and round, but always leading back to his twelfth birthday. He heard the kids walking towards him; he felt them blot out the sun, and they were older, standing around him.

"Willie! Where you goin'?" They kicked his suitcase.

How tall they stood to the sun. In the last few months it seemed the sun had passed a hand above their heads, beckoned, and they were warm metal, drawn melting upwards; they were golden toffee pulled by an immense gravity to the sky, thirteen, fourteen years old, looking down upon Willie, smiling, but already beginning to neglect him.

It had started four months ago: "Choose your sides! Who wants Willie?"

"Aw, Willie's too little; we don't play with kids."

And they raced ahead of him, drawn by the moon and the sun and the turning seasons of leaf and wind, and he was twelve years old and not of them any more. And the other voices beginning again on the old, the dreadfully familiar, the cool refrain: "Better feed that boy vitamins, Steve.". "Anna, does shortness *run* in your family?"

And the cold fist kneading at your heart again, and knowing that the roots would have to be pulled up again after so many good years with the "folks."

"Willie, where you goin'?"

He jerked his head. He was back among the towering, shadowing boys who milled round him like giants at a drinking-fountain, bending down.

"Goin' visitin' a cousin of mine for a few days."

"Oh."

There was a day, a year ago, when they would have cared very much indeed. But now there was only curiosity about his luggage, their enchantment with trains and trips and far places.

"How about a coupla fast ones?" said Willie.

They looked doubtful but, considering the circumstances, nodded. He dropped his bag and ran out; the white baseball was up in the sun, away to their burning white figures in the far meadow, up in the sun again, rushing, life coming and going in a pattern. Here, there! Mr. and Mrs. Robin Hanlon, Creek Bend, Wisconsin, 1932, the first couple, the first year! Here, there! Henry and Alice Boltz, Limeville, Iowa, 1935! The baseball

flying. The Smiths, the Eatons, the Robinsons! 1939! 1945! Husband and wife, husband and wife, husband and wife, no children, no children, no children! A knock on this door, a knock on that.

" Pardon me. My name is William. I wonder if—"

" A sandwich? Come in. Sit down. Where you from, son? "

The sandwich, a tall glass of cold milk, the smiling, the nodding, the comfortable, leisurely talking.

" Son, you look as if you've been travelling. You run away from somewhere? "

" No."

" Boy, are you an orphan? "

Another glass of milk.

" We always wanted kids. It never worked out. Never knew why. One of those things. Well, well. It's getting late, son. Don't you think you'd better hit for home? "

" Got no home."

" A boy like you? Not dry behind the ears? Your mother'll be worried."

" Got no home and no folks anywhere in the world. I wonder if —I wondĕr—could I sleep here tonight? "

" Well, now, son, I don't just know. We never considered taking in—" said the husband.

" We've got chicken for our supper tonight," said the wife, " enough for extras, enough for company . . . "

And the years turning and flying away, the voices, and the faces, and the people, and always the same first conversations.

The voice of Emily Robinson, in her rocking-chair, in summer-night darkness, the last night he stayed with her, the night she discovered his secret, her voice saying: " I look at all the little children's faces going by. And I sometimes think: What a shame, what a shame, that all these flowers have to be cut, all these bright fires have to be put out. What a shame these, all these you see in schools or running by, have to get tall and unsightly and wrinkle and turn grey or get bald, and finally, all bone and wheeze, to die and be buried away. When I hear them laugh, I can't believe they'll ever go the road I'm going. Yet here they come!

" I still remember Wordsworth's poem: *When all at once I saw a crowd, A host of golden daffodils; Beside the lake, beneath the trees, Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.*

" That's how I think of children, cruel as they sometimes are, mean as I know they can be, but not yet showing the meanness round their eyes or in their eyes, not yet full of tiredness. They're so eager for everything! I guess that's what I miss most in older folks, the eagerness gone nine times out of ten, the freshness,

so much of the drive and life gone. I like to watch school let out each day. It's as if someone threw a bunch of flowers out of the school doors. How does it feel, Willie? How does it feel to be young for ever? To look like a silver dime, new from the mint? Are you happy? Are you as fine as you seem?"

The baseball whizzed from the blue sky, stung his hand like a great pale insect. Nursing it, he heard his memory say: I worked with what I had. After my folks died, after I found I couldn't get a man's work anywhere, I tried fairs, but they only laughed. "Son," they said, "you're not a midget, and even if you were, you look like a boy! We want midgets with midgets' faces! Sorry, son, sorry."

So I left home, started out, thinking: What *was* I? A boy. I looked like a boy, sounded like a boy, so I might as well go on being a boy. No use fighting it. No use screaming. So what could I do? What job was handy?

And then one day I saw this man in a restaurant looking at another man's pictures of his children. "Sure wish I had kids," he said. "Sure wish I had kids." He kept shaking his head. And me sitting a few seats away from him, a hamburger on my plate. I sat there, *frozen*!

At that very instant I knew what my job would be for all the rest of my life. There was work for me, after all. Making lonely people happy. Keeping myself busy. Playing for ever. I knew I had to play for ever. Deliver a few papers, run a few errands, mow a few lawns, maybe. But hard work? No. All I had to do was be a mother's son and a father's pride.

I turned to the man down the counter from me. "I beg your pardon," I said. I smiled at him . . .

"But, Willie," said Mrs. Emily, long ago, "didn't you ever get lonely? Didn't you ever want—*things*—that grown-ups wanted?"

"I fought that out alone," said Willie. "I'm a boy, I told myself, I'll have to live in a boy's world, read boys' books, play boys' games, cut myself off from everything else. I can't be both. I've got to be only one thing—young. And so I played that way. Oh, it wasn't easy. There were times—" He lapsed into silence.

"And the family you lived with, they never knew?"

"No. Telling them would have spoilt everything. I told them I was a runaway; I let them check through official channels, police. Then, when there was no record, let them apply to adopt me. That was best of all; as long as they never guessed. But then, after three years or five years, they guessed, or a travelling

man came through, or someone from a fair saw me, and it was over. It always had to end."

"And you're very happy and it's *nice* being a child for over forty years?"

"It's a living, as they say. And when you make other people happy, then you're almost happy too. I've got my job to do and I do it. And anyway, in a few years now I'll be in my second childhood. All the fevers will be out of me and all the unfulfilled things and most of the dreams. Then I can relax, maybe, and play the role whole-heartedly."

He threw the baseball one last time and broke the reverie. Then he was running to seize his luggage. Tom, Bill, Jamie, Bob, Sam—their names moved on his lips. They were embarrassed at his shaking hands with them. "After all, Willie, it ain't as if you're going to China or Timbuktu."

"That's right, isn't it?" Willie did not move.

"So long, Willie. See you next week!"

"So long, so long!"

And he was walking off with his suitcase again, looking at the trees, going away from the boys, and the street where he had lived, and as he turned the corner a train whistle screamed, and he began to run.

The last thing he saw and heard was a white ball tossed at a high roof, back and forth, back and forth, and two voices crying out as the ball pitched now up, down, and back through the sky, "Annie, annie, over! Annie, annie, over!" like the crying of birds flying off to the far south.

In the early morning, with the smell of the mist and the cold metal, with the iron smell of the train around him, and a full night of travelling shaking his bones and his body, and a smell of the sun beyond the horizon, he awoke and looked out upon a small town just arising from sleep. Lights were coming on, soft voices muttered, a red signal bobbed back and forth, back and forth in the cold air. There was that sleeping hush in which echoes are dignified by clarity, in which echoes stand nakedly alone and sharp. A porter moved by, a shadow in shadows.

"Sir," said Willie.

The porter stopped.

"What town's this?" whispered the boy in the dark.

"Valleyville."

"How many people?"

"Ten thousand. Why? This your stop?"

"It looks green." Willie gazed out at the cold morning town for a long time. "It looks nice and quiet," said Willie.

" Son," said the porter, " you know where you're going? "

" Here," said Willie, and got up quietly in the still, cool, iron-smelling morning, in the dark of the train, with a rustling stir.

" I hope you know what you're doing, boy," said the porter.

" Yes, sir," said Willie. " I know what I'm doing."

And he was down the dark aisle, luggage lifted after him by the porter, and out in the smoking, steaming-cold, beginning-to-lighten morning. He stood looking up at the porter and the black metal train against the few remaining stars. The train gave a great wailing blast of whistle, the porters cried out all along the line, the cars jolted, and his special porter waved and smiled down at the boy there, the small boy there with the big luggage who shouted up to him, even as the whistle screamed again.

" What? " shouted the porter, hand cupped to ear.

" Wish me luck! " cried Willie.

" Best of luck, son," called the porter, waving, smiling. " Best of luck, boy! "

" Thanks! " said Willie, in the great sound of the train, in the steam and roar.

He watched the black train until it was completely gone away and out of sight. He did not move all the time it was going. He stood quietly, a small boy, twelve years old, on the worn wooden platform, and only after three entire minutes did he turn at last to face the empty streets beyond.

Then, as the sun was rising, he began to walk very fast, so as to keep warm, down into the new town.

★ ★ ★

ANSWERS to THE PLEASURE OF YOUR COMPANY

on page 34

1. *The wedding, in " The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," by S. T. Coleridge.*
2. *A deed without a name, but we might call it a command performance given by the Witches, in " Macbeth," by William Shakespeare.*
3. *Lob's dinner-party, in " Dear Brutus," by J. M. Barrie.*
4. *A game of bridge with the ladies, in W. Somerset Maugham's story, " The Three Fat Women of Antibes."*
5. *A drive with Toad, in " The Wind in the Willows," by Kenneth Grahame.*
6. *A drink at the Three Pigeons ale-house, in " She Stoops to Conquer," by Oliver Goldsmith.*
7. *Gathering strawberries at Donwell Abbey, in " Emma," by Jane Austen.*
8. *The hunt, in " The Hunting of the Snark," by Lewis Carroll.*

PRIVATE VIEW

O what shall I hang on the chamber walls?
And what shall the pictures be that I hang
on the walls?

WALT WHITMAN

Behind us hung a Coreggio Saint Sebastian, with the usual Buchmanite expression on his face.

" Awful tripe," said Uncle Matthew, " fella wouldn't be grinning, he'd be dead with all those arrows in him."

On the opposite wall was the Montdore Botticelli which Uncle Matthew said he wouldn't give 7s. 6d. for, and when Davey showed him a Leonardo drawing he said his fingers only itched for an india-rubber.

" I saw a picture once," he said, " of shire horses in the snow. There was nothing else, just a bit of broken-down fence and three horses. It was dangerous good—Army and Navy. If I'd been a rich man I'd have bought that—I mean you could see how cold those poor brutes must have felt. If all this rubbish is supposed to be valuable, that must be worth a fortune."

NANCY MITFORD, *Love in a Cold Climate*

Commercial

The youngest (Singleton his name)
A comic artist he became,
And made an income fairly good
By drawing funny heads on wood.

W. S. GILBERT, *The Three Bohemian Ones*

Abstract Creation

They were now back before the picture that had prompted Mr. Braunkopf to institute his comparison between the late Gavin Limbert and Titian. Appleby looked at it doubtfully.

" What's it called? " he demanded.

Mr. Braunkopf's eye lit up, and his clutch tightened on Appleby's arm. This, it seemed, was a stage in the selling of his wares that he was well accustomed to and knew to be propitious. " Seagulls and Fish," he said confidently. " This rich meal of colour is called Seagulls and Fish. An oil on burlap."

" Burlap—what's that? " Appleby now sounded positively suspicious.

" Very hard wearing." Mr. Braunkopf met him instantly on his own ground. " All this wonderful rich indigestible banquet

of colour last you a long time. One hundred guineas. And Lady Appleby will think you gave two, three hundred."

"I see." Appleby, who had been feeling with some compunction that he ought not for his own entertainment to detain Braunkopf from more likely prey, a little hardened at this suggestion. "And the big one—what's that called?"

"The *chef-d'oeuvre*?" Braunkopf's eye kindled further. At the same time he hedged, having evidently neglected the crucial matter of nomenclature in this particular instance. "It is an abstraction, Sir John—an abstraction in a *voonderble* new artistic manner."

"I think a picture should have a name." Appleby appeared to lose interest.

"But certainly it has a name." And Braunkopf smiled reassuringly, while his eye simultaneously sought inspiration from the ceiling. "The Fifth Day of Creation. This puttikler voonderble last great picture by Limbert is called that. The Sixth Day of Creation."

"I thought you said the Fifth."

"Both." Braunkopf was firm. "The Fifth and Sixth Days of Creation. This voonderble picture is an abstraction. And time is an abstraction too."

"But not the price?" MICHAEL INNES, *A Private View*

Material Needs

Your trade was with sticks and clay.
You thumbed, thrust, patted and polished,
Then laughed, "They will see some day
Smith made and Gibson demolished."

My business was song, song, song;
I chirped, cheeped, trilled and twittered,
"Kate Brown's on the boards ere long,
And Grisi's existence embittered!"

I earned no more by a warble
Than you by a sketch in plaster;
You wanted a piece of marble,
I needed a music master.

ROBERT BROWNING, *Youth and Art*

High Art

The habit in America of hanging pictures up near the cornice struck me as irrational at first. It was not until I saw how bad the pictures were that I realized the advantage of the custom.

OSCAR WILDE

Detail

I had never really wanted a photograph of a picture before I saw Millet's Man With The Hoe. I was about twelve or thirteen years old, I had read Eugénie Grandet of Balzac, and I did have some feeling about what french country was like but The Man With The Hoe made it different, it made it ground not country, and France has been that to me ever since. France is made of ground, of earth.

When I managed to get a photograph of the picture and took it home my eldest brother looked at it and said what is it and I said it is Millet's Man With The Hoe. It is a hell of a hoe said my eldest brother.

GERTRUDE STEIN, *Paris France*

Wet Paint

Within an hour the Gallant Band
Were pouring in on every hand,
From Putney, Hackney Downs, and Bow
With Courage high and Hearts a-glow
They galloped, roaring through the Town,
" Matilda's House is Burning Down!"
Inspired by British Cheers and Loud
Proceeding from the Frenzied Crowd,
They ran their ladders through a score
Of windows on the Ball Room Floor;
And took Peculiar Pains to Souse
The Pictures up and down the House,
Until Matilda's Aunt succeeded
In showing them they were not needed;
And even then she had to pay
To get the Men to go away!

HILAIRE BELLOC, *Matilda*

Brown Study

The Queue stood up on the model throne and scratched himself voluptuously. He had insisted upon being painted in a sarong. But at the same time he had refused to undress. He came over and stood behind Alistair's shoulder looking critically at the canvas. " That won't do," he said petulantly. " Make me more *brown.*"

PAMELA BRANCH, *Lion in the Cellar*

★ *In this vivid and unusual description of a Malayan bullfight, (included in "A Selection of his Writings," published as a tribute at the time of his eightieth birthday), H. M. Tomlinson—famous for his novels and essays, particularly for his sea stories—shows that distinction of prose and sureness of touch which his readers have long learnt to delight in.*

BULLFIGHT

by H. M. TOMLINSON

★

WE landed next morning at Tumpat, thus far justifying faith, for nothing noteworthy was visible from our anchorage. Tumpat is on the present main channel of the delta of the Kelantan, a river which changes its mind about its channels now and then; and from Tumpat crossed the river to Kota Bharu, the capital of the native state of Kelantan, where its Sultan resides. To have such a name, and a Sultan, and to be placed on the shore of the China Sea in such a light, should be enough for any town. From what I could see of it one might do well at Kota Bharu. . .

That afternoon, by invitation, we saw a bullfight, at which the Sultan and his court were present. The Malays of Kelantan, their disposition being entirely happy, delight in the fighting of bulls, buffaloes, rams, cocks, and fish. The Sultan, it was whispered, keeps registers of all the fighting animals in the state, is regularly informed of their condition, and arranges the tournaments. This was one. It was a sparkling festival. But for those fighting bulls I should never have seen so many of the ladies of Kota Bharu. The massed colours of their silk sarongs and headscarves were emphatic and influential.

Each bull seemed to be hidden within the ambush of a rainbow; from his happy seclusion he sent out his distracting shrill challenges. They were humped cattle, small but athletic, with brass or silver guards to the points of their horns. Their hooves were polished. Their coats played like satin with the light. They were haughty. To caresses which would have won the coldest rajah they were massively indifferent. They appeared to know that their part in the show was not love, and to reject it sternly.

The favourite was a little black animal. He was quiet, even sleepy. He submitted to the shampooing of his coat and the massaging of his limbs with the proud nonchalance of a popular

champion. Children might play with him and they did. And while the children played, the book-makers gave the picture a familiar touch of Epsom Downs. Malays are dour and irreclaimable gamblers, and I found that to share this human failing no knowledge of the vernacular is necessary. The betting was two to one on the champion.

The two bulls for the first round were led by their men into a large enclosure. There for a space they were fondled in opposite corners, while, so far as I could see, good advice was whispered earnestly into their ears. The guards to their horns were removed, and a man from each went over to inspect the sharp horns of the other animal, probably for poison. Then a gong droned and the comely gladiators were marched to face each other at a distance of about fifty yards. The gong crashed, and the crowd raised the shrill and fearful Malay war cry. Each bull exploded in a cloud of dust.

I felt at that moment a spasm of apprehensive indignation at the cruelty of it; but the bulls understood each other. It was all right. Anyhow, one bull understood the other. The little champion appeared to be outmatched. He kept carefully his front on feet as nimble as a cat's, but was pushed about the field. I felt I could only wait for his end. There were sharp convulsive onsets; or the fighters stood with horns interlocked, waiting for each other to move. But I noticed each time that it was the big aggressive fellow who moved first. Once the two fighters separated—gazed round calmly at us while their flanks heaved—ignored each other—showed clearly that this was fun and that they had had enough of it.

But the war cry roused them, and the cry rose an octave when they met in the shock of another charge. The champion stumbled at the impact. His opponent instantly became distinctly savage and more active; and the book-makers thereupon raced round the enclosure offering three to one on the champion, which I thought was ridiculous logic. The champion was bleeding at the shoulder. He was tired, and was in retreat. Once or twice now, when their horns were mingled, and they stood with their muzzles to the ground for a breathing-space, like statues, watching each other, I thought I observed that the little fellow experimented with his challenger. He appeared to test him with a modest feint or two. Yet this only inflamed to fury his enemy, who drove him backwards again straddle-legged over a dozen yards or so.

This happened once too often. At the end of one of these retreats the little champion played some caper. I do not know what. I could not see it. It was instantaneous. But there the

big bull was, on his ribs, and his enemy's armed front was prodding his belly, daring him to move. The beaten bull, lately so aggressive, did not move. Once he raised his head, and if there was not in his eyes a pathetic appeal to let him off then I do not know that expression.

The champion understood it, like the gentleman he was. He turned away his head as though he had forgotten something, and on the instant the defeated gladiator was on his feet and trotting away briskly to his corner.

* * *

ARGOSY PRIZE CROSSWORD

PRIZE-WINNERS OF CROSSWORD NO. 13

We are pleased to announce the three winners of Argosy's thirteenth Prize Crossword Competition :—

A. Maclean Esq., Fallside Road, Glasgow.

Mrs. V. B. Cole, Marlborough Buildings, Bath, Somerset.

Mrs. Joan M. Bull, Dowlans Road, Great Bookham, Surrey.

These readers, who sent in the first correct solutions to be checked on the closing date, each receive a one-guinea book token.

SOLUTION

Across. 1, *Puffin.* 4, *Ordinary.* 9, *In love.* 10, *Afflatus.* 12, *Tacitus.* 13, *Ear-ache.* 14, *Red letter day.* 17, *Eating-houses.* 22, *Roaming.* 23, *Dilemma.* 24, *Dispirit.* 25, *Ensued.* 26, *Eventide.* 27, *No fear.*

Down. 1, *Painters.* 2, *Felicide.* 3, *Invitee.* 5, *Rifle Brigade.* 6, *Illyria.* 7, *Attica.* 8, *Yester.* 11, *A sitting bird.* 15, *As a mouse.* 16, *Islander.* 18, *Animist.* 19, *Orlando.* 20, *Bridge.* 21, *Tassie.*

PRIZE CROSSWORD NO. 16. Argosy's sixteenth Prize Crossword Competition appears on page 144. There will be one-guinea book tokens for the first five correct solutions checked on the closing date. Entries should be completed *in ink*, and posted to: ARGOSY PRIZE CROSSWORD (No. 16), 3 Pilgrim Street, London, E.C.4 (Comp.), to arrive by Thursday, September 9th, the closing date.

We regret that entry must be limited to readers living in Great Britain, Northern Ireland, the Channel Islands and Eire. There is no entry fee and the Editor's decision is final.

Names of the prize-winners in this competition and the solution will appear in the issue of Argosy on sale November 10th.

The Second Part of

MARGIN OF TERROR

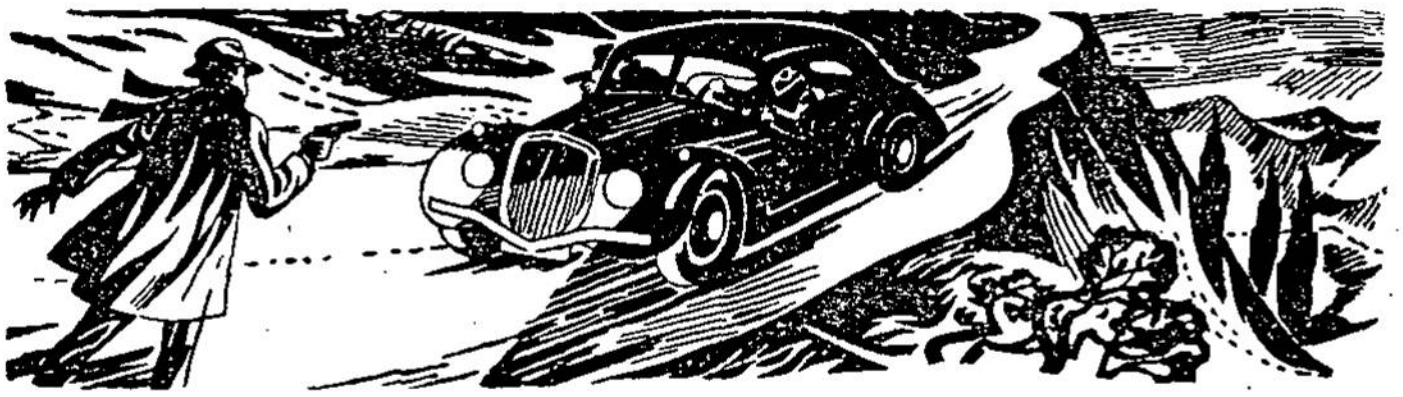
by WILLIAM P. McGIVERN

Mark Rayburn, a young engineer who has been working in Italy, postpones his return to the States, after a strange, last-minute encounter with Amanda Warren, a lovely American girl, in Rome. Why did she run away? Why did she fear this man Marioff? According to Johnny Dreyk, a renegade American journalist of communist persuasion, he is a harmless Greek coffee merchant, but Mark decides to investigate.

On re-entering his hotel, he is surprised to find the three others dining amicably together. However, Johnny, whose services Marioff has enlisted, soon finds himself under the guard of two henchmen, Anton and Gregor.

Meanwhile, Mark, having traced the girl, notices they are being followed, and he is therefore not satisfied when she says there is no longer any reason to fear Marioff. Mark goes on to Johnny's flat, where a man he remembers seeing in his hotel comes for some papers for Johnny. When Maria, Johnny's little Italian mistress, tries to interfere, the man fells her and pulls a gun on Mark.

The next day Mark takes Amanda sightseeing and learns of her husband's death in an accident some years before. Noticing that they are again being followed, he insists on the truth.



AMANDA WARREN turned to him and he saw the tears in her eyes. " My brother is in trouble with Marioff," she said, in a weary, even voice. " How or why, I don't know. But it's serious, desperate trouble. I can help him by doing what Marioff wants. Do you understand that? "

" What does Marioff want you to do? "

She looked away, and said, " You might guess if you weren't so damned noble. He wants *me*, for some curious reason."

" I don't believe you," he said slowly.

They had turned into the street, and the driver was easing left towards the brightly lighted entrance of the Hotel Wilson.

" Outraged and repelled, I imagine," she said.

" No, it's nothing like that," he said. He looked at her, frowning. " Can't you tell him to go to hell? "

" Perhaps I don't want to."

He went inside the lobby and waited while she got her room key from the clerk. She turned to him then, and they shook hands stiffly and formally. " Have a good trip," she said.

" Thanks."

He watched her walk towards the lifts, her head lowered slightly, and then he went outside and stood on the pavement under the canopy and watched the rain falling heavily into the street. The commissionaire asked him if he wanted a cab and he said yes.

As he was climbing in, he saw the man in the tweed jacket again, standing now on the slight incline that led to the top of the Spanish Stairs. His job was over for the time being, Mark guessed. Last night the man in the Renault had driven away when Amanda returned to the hotel. If that was the pattern, then this character could call it a day and get in out of the rain.

Mark told his driver to take him to the Ariosto. But when they rounded the first corner, he changed his mind. He told the driver to stop and paid him off. The driver shrugged and shook his fingers at this foolishness, but by then Mark was out of the cab and walking rapidly back. He glanced down the street towards the Wilson, and saw the man in the tweed jacket coming towards him through the shadowy gloom, his head pulled in, turtle-fashion, against the rain.

Mark backed and turned into the doorway of a wine shop. He lit a cigarette, bending his head low to the flashing match. Footsteps sounded behind him, went by with a squishing noise. Mark waited a few seconds, then looked out, and saw the bulky figure in

the tweed jacket, ahead of him now, moving up the pavement towards the Via Veneto.

The man obviously didn't expect to be followed. He walked rapidly, looking straight ahead, and Mark fell in behind him, his hat brim pulled down, his coat collar turned up about his throat.

When they turned into the Via Veneto he thought they were heading for the Ariosto, but the man continued down the hill, past the Embassy, and went into the Buonaparte Hotel, after first shaking himself like a dog coming out of water.

Mark waited a few minutes on the pavement and then went into the hotel. The man with the camera wasn't in the lobby. Frowning slightly, Mark glanced at his watch. It was four o'clock. His time was about up. He hesitated a few seconds, then went to the desk, and asked for the manager, Eduardo Ranalli. The clerk said, "He's in the office, Mr. Rayburn. You go straight in, and I'll phone to tell him you're coming."

Ranalli had been Mark's friend for two years. He had introduced Mark to mountain-climbing, and they had spent a dozen or so week-ends together in the Dolomites.

A tall, heavily built man with thick black eyebrows, he sprang to his feet when Mark came into his office. "Well, well, old friend, I thought you'd be in New York by now," he said, shaking Mark's hand mightily. "Couldn't tear yourself away, eh?"

"My plans were changed," Mark said.

"Well, what are your plans now?"

"I'm leaving tonight, 5.30."

"You're in for another disappointment, I'm afraid. Ciampino's weathered in. They're not flying tonight."

Mark felt a definite sense of relief. He wasn't sure whether he'd intended to leave or not; but now the decision was out of his hands.

"Eduardo, this is an imposition. But I called in to find out something about one of your guests."

"Which one?"

"There's a man staying here who wears a tweed jacket with leather elbow-patches. When I saw him he carried a camera. He's big, awkward, and ugly. I want to know who he is, and what he's doing in Rome."

"I've seen him," Ranalli said. He hesitated, and then smiled. "I shouldn't do this, but, of course, I shall. Wait here a moment, and I'll fetch his registration card."

Mark pushed his hat back on his forehead and paced the floor, smoking a tasteless cigarette. Why was he shoving ahead into this business? Because he hadn't believed her last, desperate lie? Maybe. She wasn't the sort to sell herself to anyone. Oh, stop it, he thought, dropping his cigarette in an ashtray. *She isn't the sort* . . . What a weary, empty phrase! How could he know what sort she was? All he knew about her was that she was in trouble, and that she had lied to him repeatedly. He didn't want her to be the person she said she was, but that was wistful nonsense; it didn't affect the facts.

Eduardo came back then with a stiff oblong card in his hand.

" Here, look this over," he said. Mark studied the bold, square handwriting on the registration form. The man's name was Paul Tzara, he was forty-five, and he'd been in Rome ten days. He had come from Bucharest, and named that city as his next destination. He gave his occupation as merchant.

" Do you want to copy that? " Ranalli asked.

" No, I can remember what I need."

Ranalli rubbed his chin. " Yes? And what is it you need? "

" I really don't know."

" I see, which is a silly thing people say when they are completely confused," Ranalli sighed gently, and his expression was grave. " Remember this, old friend. Paul Tzara may be a merchant, but he wouldn't be allowed to travel outside Rumania unless he was *trusted* by the régime. How are you mixed up with him? "

" I'm not."

" That's excellent. Keep out of his way."

Eduardo walked with him to the lobby and they shook hands. " The next time we meet, it will be to discuss the Alps," Ranalli said. " Is that a promise? "

" A promise," Mark said, smiling.

When he went outside he stood for a few moments on the pavement. Two of the men involved with the girl were from countries within the Russian orbit—Paul Tzara and the big Pole he'd encountered in Johnny's apartment. He thought of the implications of that for a moment or so, ignoring the rain that was falling, and the clamorous, irritable sound of bus and taxi horns. Then he went to the kerb and waved for a cab.

Mark gave the driver an address on the river near the Piazza del Popolo. This was the home of Umberto di Stefano, an old man who had worked for him in Leghorn. Umberto had been a communist organizer in Europe for thirty years, and there was a chance that he might know Paul Tzara or the big Pole.

When Mark had first met Umberto, the old man had been living in an economic no-man's-land. He had broken with the communists, but his reputation made the conservatives cautious about accepting him or, what was more vital, giving him work.

Mark had liked and trusted the old man, and, despite discreet protests from his company, had offered him a job. They became good friends after that, and Mark usually spent an evening with him when he was in Rome. Umberto lived in the servant's house behind an old mansion on the Tiber. The entrance to it was on a side street. Mark told his driver to wait for him and crossed to the wrought-iron gates which guarded the driveway. A pale yellow light gleamed above the side door of the mansion, and shadows stretched down the drive to Umberto's little house.

Mark pressed a button, and seconds later the lock clicked, and a door in the gate opened a few inches. He went in, ducking through the small door, and walked down the drive through the shadows and rain. Light appeared before him and Umberto's figure was outlined

in a doorway. The old man was surprised and pleased to see him.

" Come in, come in," he said, shaking Mark's hand. " I thought you had gone home."

Umberto's small living-room was cluttered with manuscripts, books, and correspondence. Two violins were propped against the wall, and a music-stand stood in a corner. A charcoal fire glowed hotly.

" It is a good night to sit and talk," Umberto said, smiling at Mark.

He was a tall old man with battered, formidable features, but his eyes were mild and compassionate. Although he was well into his sixties, he carried his lean body with soldierly smartness. Now, as he studied Mark, his smile faded.

" What is the matter? " he said.

" I need your help, Umberto. There are two men in Rome I must know something about," Mark said.

" Rome is a big city," Umberto said, and smiled tentatively.

" These aren't Romans. One is from Poland, the other from Rumania."

" What is your business with them? " Umberto said, and now a frown was gathering on his battered features.

Mark told him as much as he knew, while the old man listened.

" This girl, the American, has no great love for the truth," he said, when Mark stopped speaking.

" She's being forced to lie."

" Maybe, maybe not." Umberto turned his palms up and shrugged. " She could be working with them. An American passport is no guarantee of honour, you know. But it's an odd business. Why are you involved? "

" It's the way I'm built, I guess."

Umberto put a hand on his arm. " Listen to me, please. You are a young man, and you have a big future." He shook his head. " *Keep out of this thing.*"

" I can't walk out on her."

Umberto stared at him for a few seconds, searching his face with his eyes. " I suppose you are right. What is it you wish me to do? "

" I want you to take a look at these men."

" Yes, there is the possibility I may know them," Umberto said, after a little pause. " Very well. I will get my coat."

They left Umberto's house and went out to the cab. Umberto said, " You know where they are now? "

" The one who called himself Marioff told me he took a walk every night after dinner. We can park opposite the hotel and wait for him to come out."

" Very well, we will try it." Umberto leaned forward and told the driver to take them to the Via Veneto and to park opposite the Hotel Ariosto.

The rain fell steadily, whipped this way and that by the wind. Mark sat forward on the seat, occasionally rubbing steam from the cab window, and watching the revolving doors of the hotel.

They had been waiting an eternity: it was now almost eight o'clock.

Mark rolled his window down and the wind blew the cold rain into his face. But it was lighter now, slacking off. A few moments later the rain stopped.

Umberto leaned forward slightly and peered through the open window. Then Mark saw the big man in the black overcoat, the one who had drawn a gun on him in Johnny's apartment. He came out after a party of Americans and stopped, glancing up and down the street. His face was a pale sharp triangle under the brim of his hat. He stood without moving for a few seconds, a long, black, purposeful figure, grimly incongruous against the bright glitter of the hotel.

" There's the one who spoke Polish," Mark said.

" He's a very large man," Umberto said. " I would remember if I had seen him before. But I don't know him."

The revolving doors turned again and Marioff came down the short flight of steps, a cigar glowing in his square, impassive face. The overhead light glinted on the shiny collar of his overcoat.

Mark said, " That's Marioff."

At the same instant Umberto's hand closed on his arm with surprising strength. The old man muttered something in Italian, and then Mark heard the sound of his sharply indrawn breath.

" Do you know him? " he said.

But Umberto didn't answer; he stared across the street at Marioff, a heavy, anxious frown on his old face.

Marioff joined the big man in the black overcoat, and they exchanged a few words before turning and walking down the incline that wound past the Embassy. Umberto twisted and looked out of the rear window, following the two men until their figures merged with the darkness.

" You know him, don't you? " Mark said.

" It doesn't seem possible," Umberto said, shaking his head slowly.

In the gloom of the cab Mark could see the tension in the old man's face, and something else, something that was very close to fear.

Umberto began speaking in Italian, in a low, rapid voice, " Forgive me, I am confused. But unless my eyes tricked me, that is a man named Vasily Polov. I haven't seen him for more than fifteen years."

They looked at each other in an uneasy little silence, and then Umberto attempted a smile. " That is a long time, eh? Perhaps I am wrong. I can't be sure."

" You were sure enough when you saw him," Mark said.

" It is very dark, of course."

Mark knew then that the old man wanted him to keep away from this thing.

" Well, who is Vasily Polov? " he said casually.

" You wouldn't know him. But he is an important man in

Russia. I met him last in Antwerp at a conference. That was his most recent visit to western Europe."

"Why do you suppose he's in Rome?"

"I'm not sure he is," Umberto said. "My eyes could be wrong. They must have been, I think."

"What kind of work does he do?"

"He was an investigator during some of the purges, a head of the police during the War. He has done much more, of course. He is a hunter, an executioner."

"What would he be doing here?" Mark said.

"I told you I made a mistake," Umberto insisted.

"Let's assume you were right, then," Mark said in a sharp, sarcastic voice. "What would Vasily Polov be doing here?"

"What good is a guess?"

"Polov's mission would be an important one, right?"

The old man caught his arm with both his hands. "You *must* keep out of this thing."

"You can't make the choice for me," Mark said. "Now, listen: you knew Papa George, didn't you?"

"Yes, I knew him. In the twenties."

"You know he was kidnapped two weeks ago, don't you?"

"Yes, of course."

"Could that be why Polov is in Rome? To take Papa George back to Moscow?"

"That could be it," Umberto said wearily. "It is big enough for Polov. Important enough, dirty enough. But it could also be a feint. What are you thinking?"

"I'm not quite sure," Mark said. That wasn't the whole truth; he was thinking of Amanda Warren and wondering what possible connection she could have with a man like Vasily Polov.

"You must leave it alone," Umberto said, in a low, urgent voice.

"Could you find out why he's in Rome?" Mark said.

"No, I won't do it."

"All right, I'll take a crack at it on my own," Mark said.

"No, wait. Please. I—I can make inquiries. It will be safer."

"All right. I'll come back to your house in a couple of hours."

Mark wanted to talk to Johnny Dreyk now, and he knew that there was not much time; Polov and his gunman would be returning soon.

Mark got Marioff's room number at the desk, then, following a hunch, asked for Johnny Dreyk. The desk clerk explained that Mr. Dreyk had taken the room adjoining Mr. Marioff's suite, and planned to stop at the hotel for several days.

Mark thanked him and went upstairs. Johnny didn't answer his knock; the door was opened by a broadly built man with strong sullen features. He stared at Mark with flat, uninterested eyes.

"I want to talk to Johnny Dreyk," Mark said.

The man frowned slightly and shook his head.

"Anton, it's quite all right." Johnny's voice, light and amused,

came from inside the room. " That's my old capitalistic friend, Mark Rayburn. Let him in."

Anton stepped aside, his manner as sullenly resentful as a dog being forced away from a bone. " I do not understand the English so well," he said, staring at Mark.

Johnny Dreyk was slumped in a deep chair, a cynical, knife-sharp little smile on his face. " Well, well, missed connections again, eh? " he said.

" I want to talk to you alone."

Mark stared at the man called Anton. " Do you get it? " he said. " *Alone*. I want to talk to my friend in private."

Anton glanced at Johnny, and shrugged. He stood perfectly still, his hands in his trouser-pockets, as immovable as a block of stone.

" Is he your warder? " Mark said.

" Don't be an ass," Johnny said, but his smile was shaky as he looked at Anton. " Would you be good enough to step into the next room, please? "

Anton hesitated, staring from Johnny to Mark, and then turned and walked heavily into the adjoining room. When the door closed behind him, Johnny said, " O.K., now that you've exercised your penchant for boorish behaviour, perhaps you'll tell me what this is all about? "

Mark opened the door by which he had entered the room and glanced down the corridor. Anton was standing in the next door-way, his back resting against the jamb, in a position to cover anyone leaving Johnny's room.

Mark closed the door, and said, " Anton is outside, watching your door. How far would he let you go, Johnny? "

" You're being very foolish, even for a typical American," Johnny said, sounding each word sharply. " I'll give you a bit of good advice: clear out of here, and clear out fast."

" We're going to talk first," Mark said, staring down at him. " About Marioff. Your harmless Greek coffee trader with the four large daughters. Only let's cut out the fantasy. Let's call him by his right name, Vasily Polov. And let's get his job right. He's an agent from Moscow, a king-sized one. Now I want some answers. How is Amanda Warren mixed up with him? That's the first answer I want, Johnny."

" You've picked up some fascinating nuggets, I see," Johnny said, with a small sigh. But something in his expression had changed; his smile was brighter, less revealing. " However, I don't fancy your choice of topics. Let's talk about the weather, shall we? "

" Why did you lie to me? You wanted me out of Rome, on my way home, didn't you? "

" I still prefer the weather."

Mark paused, swallowing hard. Then he said: " I've got two thousand dollars' worth of traveller's cheques in my wallet. They're yours for a couple of answers."

" You're an amazing sort of chap," Johnny said, smiling. " I find it difficult to believe that you're ready to spend thousands of dollars just for the privilege of butting into something that doesn't concern you. Truthfully now, haven't you a more sensible reason?"

" What's your answer? Yes or no? "

" I'll save your money. You think she's in trouble. Take it from me she's not. If she does as she's told, which she's obviously finding difficult, she'll be as safe as a millionaire in America."

" That doesn't satisfy me," Mark said.

" Oh, to hell with what satisfies you," Johnny said sharply. " I'm sick of your stupid, righteous meddling. Now get out of here."

Mark took hold of Johnny's lapels and pulled him to his feet. " You'll talk," he said softly, giving way completely to his anger. " You'll talk now, or you'll talk later without any teeth in your mouth."

Johnny sagged against him, and there was a wicked, mocking smile on his lips. " The American way again, eh? If you can't buy what you want, use force."

" What's Polov's connection with the girl? "

" Maybe they're soul-mates," Johnny said, and laughed softly.

Mark flung him back into the chair, breathing deeply, harshly. He couldn't seem to get enough clean air into his lungs. Johnny wanted to be hit, he knew.

" You're a fool," Johnny said, still smiling. He made no attempt to sit up, but lay sprawled like a rag-doll in the chair. " What's the use of strength if you don't use it? "

" That's the viewpoint of your new chums," Mark said, still breathing heavily. " The big one used that philosophy when he worked over Maria. You should have been there. It was quite a scene."

" Shut up! " Johnny said, in a high, strained voice. He stared at Mark and then looked nervously down at his hands, a tight line of pain around his mouth. " Get out of here, damn you. It's none of your business."

" She means something to you, eh? " Mark said slowly.

" Get out, I said," Johnny cried, standing and pushing ineffectually at Mark's chest.

" I'm surprised," Mark said, slapping his hands away. " Emotions are a bourgeois trap, remember? What's happened to you, Johnny? "

Johnny sat down slowly on the edge of the chair, looking at the mark on the back of his hand. " Was she all right when you left her? " he said.

" Yes, she was. I might have paid off the big boy but he had a gun."

" What a perfect scene for your grim-jawed righteousness," Johnny said in a shaking voice. " I'm sure you played it grandly. Maria would love it, of course. She dotes on American movies."

" This isn't a game, Johnny."

Johnny stood up, trying to compose his features. " You are a hero, bless you," he said bitterly. " You're as anachronistic as the dodo and the dinosaur. You're as preposterous as Don Quixote. You're an egomaniac, thinking only of your own eccentric exploits instead of the general good. The world can't afford you now, any more than a beehive could afford a system of free enterprise. The world needs men in standard shapes and sizes, with no rough edges, no disturbing bulges here and there. The day of the misfit has gone, you fool. This is the age of the conformist."

Mark walked to the door and opened it. Then he turned back and said, " You may get some disturbing bulges here and there in this deal, Johnny."

" I always look out for myself," Johnny said.

" That's honest party-line thinking, for a change," Mark said. He pulled the door shut and walked down the corridor. Anton stared at him, impassive and uninterested, then turned into his own room.

Mark went straight towards the lifts. Now he'd check with Umberto, then ring Amanda. He wasn't surprised at his interest in her; self-deception wasn't among his talents. She was a challenging, superior young woman, and she thought him a blundering fool. Normally he didn't care too much what people thought of him, but her opinion of him rankled; her lies, her assumption of self-sufficiency annoyed him, and he wanted to humble her, to make her admit that she was wrong and he was right.

The lift doors slid open as he approached and Vasily Polov stepped out, trailed by the big man with the long wide jaw. Polov halted, and the three men stared at one another in the empty corridor.

" More bad luck with connections, eh? " Polov said, smiling slightly.

" I'm in no great hurry," Mark said.

" Most of us can't afford so leisurely an attitude."

Mark planned a casual reply, but something in Polov's easy little smile brought his anger surging to the surface. The words, which he knew were intemperate and foolish, came out in a low, hard voice: " Get this straight: if anything happens to that girl I'll come looking for you. Do you understand? "

Polov's expression and smile remained bland. " That is a puzzling statement. I do not understand, of course."

" You're a liar."

" Excuse me, but there is no point in continuing this conversation."

Mark realized that he had behaved like a fool; he had squandered his one advantage and accomplished nothing. The two men watched him thoughtfully, but he sensed a change in their manner. The issue had been joined, and the first victory was theirs; they knew where he stood while he was still floundering in the dark.

He strode past them, his jaw set in anger at himself, and rang for the lift. They were still watching him, he knew, and when the

doors opened he stepped in quickly, relieved to be out of their sight . . .

Polov watched the doors close, and then he spoke to Gregor, and the big man moved swiftly and quietly to the lifts and pressed the button. He waited stolidly, like a beast in a field, staring expressionlessly at the metal gate. One hand moved as if by its own instinct and settled into the pocket of his jacket.

Polov smiled slightly when he saw that gesture, and walked down the corridor rubbing a blunt forefinger along the side of his jaw. He let himself into his room, hung his overcoat in the closet, and then began pacing the floor, frowning slightly.

Anton rose to his feet when Polov entered, but didn't speak. He stood very still, his eyes trailing Polov in the manner of an alert but incurious dog.

Johnny Dreyk came to the open doorway of the connecting room. He smiled tentatively, but Polov ignored him.

" Your American friend was here, eh? " he said, at last. " What did he want? "

" He's worried about the girl," Johnny said. His voice was casual, but his fingers were trembling. He felt hollow and weak, as if he hadn't eaten for days.

Polov shrugged and continued pacing. He wasn't worried; some trouble was inevitable, and he didn't worry about the inevitable. There had been two dangerous bits of bad luck; first the girl, then the tough, stubborn American. The girl could be managed, but Rayburn was another matter.

" He knows who I am? " Polov asked.

Johnny cleared his throat and nodded.

" What is the matter that you can't talk? " Polov said, smiling. This one was a fool, he knew. A child playing with high explosives. " Did the girl tell him? "

" I should think so," Johnny said. " She knew, didn't she? You said she wouldn't talk, you said—"

" Please be still," Polov said, and stared at him for a few seconds. " You are nothing but wind blowing over vocal cords. The wind comes from a vacuum. Don't you realize that? "

Johnny tried to ignore the insult. " I suppose you have a point," he said, smiling.

Polov turned from him, smiling slightly. Until this moment he had been rather bored, but now there was work ahead and all of his strength and instincts responded to that challenge. Without his work he moved in a vacuum, and the vacuum, like peace, was intolerable.

" What will you do? " Johnny said.

" Gregor has gone to take care of him," Polov said.

Johnny wetted his lips. He was afraid to press the matter, but more frightened of being left in doubt. " What do you mean? "

" You ask incredible questions," Polov said, and wondered why he disliked this young fool so intensely. He was a poseur, a dilettante, that was probably it. He had no strength, he was glib

and wishy-washy. America produced a preposterous, hot-house variety of communist, Polov thought privately. Most of them were misfits, really, in the movement to shock their elders, assuage their hurt feelings, or gratify some vague need to change the world.

"You ask me what I mean," Polov said now to Johnny, in a fairly reasonable voice. "I mean we must get rid of your American friend. He knows who I am, and that could be dangerous. If he talks there will be a swarm of British and American agents buzzing about here in a matter of hours. So he mustn't talk. Does that make you unhappy?"

"No, of course not," Johnny said. He could feel tears stinging at the back of his eyes. I don't like Mark Rayburn, he thought. I never liked him. He's stupid, and righteous. And what difference does it make? I'm safe, nothing can hurt me as long as I keep out of Polov's way. Johnny told himself this, driving the words silently into his mind.

Polov strolled to the windows. The moon was glowing high in the sky. A stupid city, he thought. Torrents one instant, moonlight the next. It was a weak, womanly place, with lazy, foolish men drinking coffee and sitting in the sun, and young couples strolling arm-in-arm, and women without a thought behind their bland happy smiles.

Polov stared down at the street, which shone like silver in the moonlight, and thought of the girl. She had talked to the American but, with him out of the way, they could have kept her in line. Still, it would be better this way. The final solution was always preferable, even though it added another strain to the balance of safety. Polov realized that he was rationalizing the issue to justify his emotional need for violence, and he smiled slightly. The weakness was a familiar part of him, and he had learnt to tolerate it.

Now as he made up his mind, his thoughts filtered into the past. This was a habit of his in decisive moments, and practice had made the process unconscious and instantaneous. He could plan and act as he snapped his fingers, but in that second his mind blazed with flashbacks of his history, and it was these intuitive selections from the swarming mass of his memory that determined his role in the vivid, violent present. He liked to think this, at any rate; it lent a sustaining sense of power and inevitability to his actions.

The American and the girl . . . There would be violence now, and when it was over he would go back to his desk in Moscow and there would be a stack of cases waiting his attention, all of them promising him the continuance of his dream.

This knowledge was what made him dangerous. For to Polov the means did not simply justify the end; the means had become the end. And so he planned and fought like a machine, caring little whether he won or lost. The battle itself was victory.

Now, his decision made, he glanced at Anton. "You must take care of the girl," he said. "Make it look like the work of a prowler. You know her room number?"

Anton nodded, and a tiny gleam of excitement appeared in his eyes. He went to the closet and got out his overcoat.

Johnny's hands had begun to shake and he shoved them quickly into his pockets. " You're going to kill her? " he asked, in a high, thin voice.

" It's necessary. She has talked to the American, and we can't have that." Polov smiled slightly. He felt more tolerant towards Johnny now that the decision was made. After all, this trouble wasn't Johnny's fault. He had used him to get rid of the American, to prevent him prying into the source of the girl's fear, and it was just bad luck that Rayburn had turned out to be smart and stubborn. It had been a gamble from the start, but the danger justified it; everything might have been jeopardized by the girl, and later by Rayburn.

Polov had not acted blindly; he had known Johnny Dreyk on sight. Johnny's name, background, and description had been given to him in Moscow, along with dozens of other persons throughout Europe who might be helpful in an emergency. Polov was thinking of these things as he smiled at Johnny. " It is not your fault that you failed," he said.

Johnny was trying to keep his spinning thoughts away from the girl, and Rayburn. They got themselves into it, he told himself desperately. They were stupid, obstinate fools. I'm not responsible for them, I've done nothing but sit by and watch the show, he thought, wetting his lips. To hell with them, and everybody. I'm not on anyone's side. But as he tried to meet Polov's smile he knew that he was lying to himself. Now he was on Polov's side.

" You look a bit pale," Polov said. " Would you like a glass of wine? Perhaps we could have a game of cards. We have some time to pass and we may as well spend it pleasantly."

" I don't feel like cards."

Polov laughed at him, enjoying his own confidence. " You're afraid, aren't you? You are like a child wearing his father's boots and pretending that makes him a man." He laughed again and rubbed a forefinger along his jaw. " Well, don't worry, Anton and Gregor are not children."

Johnny walked quickly into his own room, breathing very rapidly and feeling the tears spring to his eyes. Damn him, damn him, he thought fiercely. I'm safe and that's all that counts. I'm smarter than all of them, and I'll be alive and laughing when it's all over. What else mattered?

Mark took a cab from the Ariosto to Umberto's cluttered little house. The old man told him he had made inquiries of several ex-communist friends, but had learnt nothing definite of Vasily Polov or Papa George. None of his contacts knew if either of the men was in Rome—or in Italy, for that matter. Mark didn't know whether to believe him or not; there was an awkwardness in his manner that struck an off-key note.

" I am sorry I could not help," Umberto said.

Mark got into his overcoat and the old man came with him to the door.

" It is better that you aren't involved with them," Umberto said. " They are dangerous men. A generation ago we said the murders and slavery were only milestones on the road to peace. They still say that, thirty-five years later. But I do not believe them any more. My Italian friends in the party disagree. They drink wine and talk, talk, talk, thinking they can tinker with communism and make something good of it. But you can't be half-free any more than you can be half-dead . . . I am out of it, through with it," Umberto said, shaking his head.

Mark didn't want to leave him in this bitter, helpless mood. " We'll talk about it some other time," he said.

" Yes, yes, of course," Umberto said. " Wait, I'll fetch a coat and take you to the street."

They walked through the darkness to the gate. The light from the side door of the big house formed a yellow pool on the damp pavement, and beyond that the lane was silent and dark.

They stopped at the gate, a few feet from a thick tree that loomed solid and black in the darkness. Mark tried to think of something to say that would leave the old man in a happier frame of mind. But suddenly, Umberto said, in a loud, carrying voice, " Then I shall see you in America, my friend," and pushed him away with a violence and strength that sent Mark stumbling back towards the big house.

A report that was like the crack of a bull whip shattered the silence, and Mark heard Umberto's sharp gasp of pain, and then the sound of his body striking the ground.

He threw himself sideways, landing against the angle of the wall and pavement, and held his breath in the enormous stillness that followed the pistol shot.

Down the street someone shouted in a querulous, demanding voice, and a light came on in one of the apartments across the street. Mark heard the sound of footsteps, and saw a large, indistinct figure move past the iron gate. The footsteps changed to the quicker, heavier rhythm of a man running, and faded away in the direction of the Tiber.

Again the man down the street shouted something in a voice merry and blurred with drink. Someone in the apartments answered him angrily, and the lights blinked out; the crouching darkness sprang again at the street.

Mark crawled over the wet pavement and knelt beside Umberto. The old man found his hand and gripped it tightly. His face was a pale blur in the darkness.

" I want to tell you—"

" Don't talk," Mark said. " We'll get a doctor."

" Mark, you must listen to me! " The old man's voice was suddenly fresh and firm. " I lied to you. I did not want you to be hurt. When I saw the man beside the tree, I knew it was too late They want you, and they will try again, remember." His

hand tightened on Mark's. "Papa George is in Italy. Vasily Polov has come to take him back to Russia."

"Never mind that now."

"They will try again, remember."

Umberto began to cough. The voice that had been so surprisingly fresh and strong began to falter: "I am dying. I fought all my life for something evil and it killed me." He raised his head from the ground, staring into Mark's face. There was no recognition in his eyes. "It killed me twice," he said.

Those were his last words. He turned his head to one side, breathing softly. His fingers went limp in Mark's hand, and his body became completely still.

Mark stood up slowly and rubbed his forehead: he was aware of nothing but the darkness and the cold, whispering breeze in the trees. It was too late to call an ambulance or a priest, but he couldn't leave the old man this way, alone in the darkness, lying in an undignified sprawl on the damp pavement.

Something deeper than anger was running through him now. It was hatred, for Polov and his outfit, and for Johnny Dreyk. And some of it was for Amanda. She might have told him this would happen. She must have known who Polov and his assassins were, and why they had come to Rome.

Mark knelt and did what he could for the old man. It was very little. He closed his staring eyes, and straightened his arms and legs. Then he said a few clumsy words of farewell.

There were no cabs about at this hour so Mark started down the dark street towards the Piazza del Popolo. He walked for half a block, and then swore at himself and began to run.

The lobby of the Wilson was deserted at this hour, except for a man reading a two-day-old American newspaper. The few lamps that were lit cast a soft, glowing patina on the elegant rugs and furniture. Everything was quiet and still; the desk clerk was adding a column of figures, and even his pencil seemed to move drowsily down the ledger.

Mark went directly up to her room. He knocked and then glanced at his watch: it was eleven-thirty. She opened the door a few seconds later and he saw that she hadn't been asleep.

"I thought you'd left by now," she said sharply.

He pushed the door open without answering and walked into her room. She stared at him, a white line of anger about her mouth. "Is there some point to this exhibition, or do you just happen to feel masterful?"

"Close the door," he said.

She hesitated a moment; something in the set of his big shoulders, in the flat, hard look of his eyes, frightened her.

Mark stepped past her and shut the door. "We're going to talk," he said. "I know who Marioff is. His name is Vasily Polov and he's a Russian. That won't surprise you, I'm sure. And I know why he's in Rome."

" Why wouldn't you keep out of it? " she said, in a low, passionate voice. " Why did you have to play detective? "

" I wasn't playing games," he said, his face tight and hard. " A friend of mine identified Polov for me. A little later he was shot and killed. He took the bullet I was supposed to get, so don't let's call this thing a game. And don't talk about playing detective. Just as a favour to me."

She stepped back from the anger in his voice. In her soft blue robe she seemed suddenly very small and light; and her face had become pale in the frame of her dark hair. " I told you to keep out of it," she said, and now there was a catch of tears in her voice. " I told you that fifty times, didn't I? But I couldn't make you stop. It was up to me—and to you—whether my brother lived or died. No one can help, don't you understand? "

" Polov is here to pick up Papa George. You know the name, I guess? " When she nodded, he said: " I can stop that, all right."

She began to speak but he caught her arm suddenly and put a finger to his lips.

" What's the matter? " she said softly.

Mark turned, still holding her arm, and pointed to the door. He had heard footsteps in the corridor, but they hadn't gone past her room. Now, as they watched, the door-knob began to turn slowly, first one way, then the other.

They stood close together, her shoulder touching his arm, and he could hear her breathing, shallow and rapid in the deep silence.

There was a metallic scraping against the lock. Mark pulled her towards the centre of the room, and whispered, " Get into the bathroom. Lock the door. Quick."

" What are you going to do? "

" Never mind. Get in there and lock the door."

She hesitated, fighting stubbornly against her fear. " Phone to the desk," she said.

" There's no time. Damn it, do what I say."

She seemed to understand then. She stared at the turning knob, very pale now, and then she slipped into the bathroom and closed the door behind her.

Mark snapped off the lamp and moved carefully across the room. He stopped a few feet to the left of the door, removed his coat, and put it out of the way on the floor.

Mark waited in the darkness, listening to the sound of the tool biting at the lock, trying to breathe deeply and evenly. He didn't have to wait long; something snapped in the lock and the door swung inward, letting a bar of light fall from the corridor into the room.

A heavy man's figure came into the room, moving fast in a low, springy crouch. He kicked the door shut with a backward swing of his foot, and started for Amanda's bed, the faint, indirect light glinting on the gun in his hand.

Mark took two steps forward and hurled himself on the man's back, locking his arms to his sides. They went down together, the

man grunting and bucking against Mark's weight. There was a bull-like strength in his body; the savage twist of his shoulders almost broke Mark's grip as they hit the floor. They rolled over twice, knocking the lamp against the wall, upsetting the heavy reading chair. Then the bathroom door opened and light spilt into the room.

Mark saw the gun on the floor, twisted desperately, and kicked it under the bed. Amanda ran past them to the phone and began jiggling the hook frantically.

The man worked his hands up to Mark's locked wrists, pulled them apart, and then rolled away, and came bouncing to his feet. Scrambling up, Mark recognized him as Anton, the man who'd been guarding Johnny at the Ariosto.

Anton wasted a second, peering about for his gun, and then lunged at Mark, his massive hands searching for his throat. There was no expression on his face, but his eyes were intent and furious.

Mark backed away from him, snapping a straight hard left into his face. Anton shook his head and ploughed in, his hands spread, his knees crouched to leap.

Amanda was speaking into the phone, her voice high but controlled. Mark shouted, "Turn on the lights," and she dropped the receiver, snapped the switch, and the room was flooded with brightness.

Mark shifted sideways, jabbing viciously with his left. Then he stepped in, whipping his body round and crossed his right into Anton's jaw. It was a good punch, with a hundred and ninety pounds behind it, but Anton came on, his eyes blinking rapidly, his face empty of all expression. He knew nothing of boxing, obviously; his jaw was wide open and he made no attempt to block Mark's blows.

Anton was an engine that could break a man's neck or arms with a twist of his huge hands, but he wasn't made to function at long range.

"Now," Mark said softly. The need for physical release had been building up in him for an eternity, it seemed; it was deeper than anger or hatred, it was rooted in the intolerable sense of impotence he had known for the past two days.

He hit Anton with four more rights, feeling a jar that streaked from his knuckles to his elbow with each blow, and when he threw the fifth punch, Anton stopped short, swaying slightly, a thin, bewildered frown on his face. Then he turned and lumbered towards the door, but Mark tripped him with his foot and he crashed heavily to the floor. When he worked himself to a sitting position, Mark had climbed over the bed, found the gun, and was pointing it at his head.

Two porters and the desk clerk came charging into the room then, their faces working with excitement, and when Anton saw them and the gun Mark held on him, his shoulders sagged and he stared down glumly at his big, limp hands.

The police took him away fifteen minutes later, and the guests

who had been aroused by the commotion were gently persuaded to return to their rooms. The Lieutenant of carabinieri who remained was a slim young man, spruce in his olive-grey uniform. He frowned as Mark gave his version of the fight.

" You never saw this man before, eh? " he said, glancing from Mark to Amanda, including her in the query.

" I didn't know him," Mark said. Amanda looked at him and shook her head slowly.

" A prowler, a thief? " the Lieutenant asked of no one in particular. He glanced at the assistant manager of the hotel, who was standing at the door, and shrugged. " That is his story, in any case."

" It has not happened here before," the assistant manager said, rubbing his hands together nervously. " I apologize for this outrage. It is only through the grace of God that you are safe."

The Lieutenant glanced professionally at Mark's shoulders. " The grace of God had assistance, if you will pardon an irreverent remark," he said. " Now, we shall require a formal statement of this affair, but there is no hurry. It is a trifling matter. I shall send a car for you in the next day or so. Meanwhile, we shall find out some things about our prowler."

" Will he be able to communicate with anyone tonight? " Mark asked.

The Lieutenant smiled. " No, not tonight. There will be a time for that later. In America it is different, eh? Immediately upon arrest the criminal talks of his privileges, of lawyers, and bonds. We hear accounts of this generous policy from Italians you find it necessary to deport. They are dismayed that we are so barbaric, and they yearn for their dear America, where they behaved themselves so cleverly that the authorities found it best to kick them out. But I take up your time with this gossip." He bowed to Amanda, gave Mark a two-fingered salute, and, with the assistant manager at his heels, went smartly down the corridor to the lift.

Mark closed the door and lit a cigarette.

The knuckles of his right hand throbbed painfully. Amanda sat on the edge of the bed, a slippered foot swinging slowly, and looked up at him, her eyes enormous and dark in the whiteness of her face.

" Why did you lie to him? " she said. " Why didn't you tell him about Polov and Papa George? "

" Because there might be communists in the Italian police. The news would go straight back to Polov." He pulled a chair over beside her and sat down. " Now, listen, Amanda, I want the whole story. Everything. We don't have much time."

" What do you mean? "

" Polov committed one murder tonight and attempted another. He or his men, it's the same thing. He wouldn't pull anything that could upset his time-table unless he were through in Rome and ready to move."

Amanda stared down at the backs of her hands, her lips trembling slightly. All the cold assurance which he had found so irritating had left her now; she seemed very weary and helpless.

" My brother is in Russia," she said in a still, empty voice. " He went there in 1948 by his own choice. With Vasily Polov." She looked up at him, her hands twisting together in her lap. " That's the whole story, Mark. That's everything. The rest is just detail. My father was a food administrator for UNRRA. He took me and my brother Peter with him to Belgrade in 1948. That was in August, and it was a vacation trip.

" We met Polov there at a dinner-party, and once again at a parade commemorating something or other, I forget just what. But Polov made an impression on my brother. When he returned to Moscow my brother went with him, of his own free will. Peter left a note, telling us he believed in Russia and wanted to be a part of the work it was doing. There was something about it in the papers, but not very much—we were getting along fairly well with Russia then, and it wasn't too important a thing, anyway." She rubbed the tips of her fingers slowly across her forehead.

" That's how I knew Polov when I saw him in the lounge at the Ariosto. I was almost too frightened to think straight. All I knew was that I must get away from him. That was why I asked you to take me up to your room. It was all I could think of. But it didn't help in any way, of course."

" Why were you afraid of him? "

" A friend of mine phoned me last week in Milan and told me she had seen Peter. Here in Rome. She wasn't absolutely certain; it was in a crowded street and he disappeared before she could speak to him.

" It was a million-to-one chance, but I had to take it. I thought he might have got out of Russia somehow, and was here, without friends or money, and too ashamed or afraid to go to the Embassy. Also, I knew the Russians might be hunting him.

" When I saw Polov that was all I could think of, that he was here to get Peter." Her voice trembled slightly. " But I was wrong. Polov isn't after him, he's after someone else. My brother is still in Moscow."

" Did Polov tell you that? "

She nodded slowly. " After I left your room, Johnny Dreyk found me and said that Polov had good news for me. We had dinner together, and Polov told me that Peter was in Moscow. He promised that he'd help Peter get out of Russia if I co-operated with him. All he asked was that I should tell no one who he is. He said he was here on a delicate mission, and that it would complicate matters if his real identity were known."

" You told me this afternoon that he wanted you as part of the bargain. Why? "

" I thought that might disgust you," she said wearily. " I thought you'd pack up and clear out. That was all that mattered. Doing what Polov wanted me to do, trying to save my brother."

" But I didn't clear out," Mark said. He paused, trying to think of something to say, something to justify himself; he'd done what he thought was right, but that explanation now seemed presumptuous and stupid. If he had signed her brother's death-warrant, what possible significance did the right or wrong of his actions possess?

She looked past him, frowning and shaking her head slowly. " My brother was only twenty-two when he went to Russia," she said. " We've heard from him twice. The first letter was very proud and happy. Russia was wonderful, the people were being given the best in housing, education, and so forth. The second was forwarded to us three years later, by a newspaperman who found it in his luggage when he returned from Moscow.

" Peter wrote us that he could never get out of Russia. And he knew he'd been wrong. He objected not so much to the price he'd paid for the truth, as he did to the ugliness of the truth. And he said he understood Polov at last, and that it was better for one's sanity not to understand such men." She rubbed her forehead again with the tips of her fingers, an unconscious, anxious gesture, and Mark found himself hating it, and hating the pressures which caused it.

" Peter was always a brilliant, moody youngster," she said, in a soft, distant voice. " He was full of compassion for everyone in the world. He hated any kind of injustice. But everything went wrong for him. Everything he tried to do just didn't work out. And it was different with me. My mother died when we were young, and I became Daddy's pet. I got along well in school, and I had friends.

" Peter resented that, and everything I did to help him just made it worse. I should have let him alone, don't you see? But I tried to help, I forced my advice on him. I was strong and happy and thought I could give him those things. But I was so wrong.

" When he became attracted to communism, I told him he was a fool. I argued with him for weeks about it, trying to make him understand that he was only buying the idea because it rationalized his own failures."

She stared down at her hands. " That drove him away from us. I didn't have the decency, the kindness to let him alone, let him work it out for himself. I had to show him that I was smart and strong, and that he was a neurotic little fool."

" You're talking a lot of nonsense," Mark said sharply. " Why in hell do you think you're responsible for what he believed in? "

" That's why I wanted to help him this time," she went on, as if she hadn't heard Mark. " Just to give him another chance. But that's all over now." She looked at him, and he saw that her eyes were bright with tears. " I can't talk any more. Please."

Mark tried to take her hands, but she twisted away from him and put her face down on the bed. " I can't talk any more," she said, in a breaking voice. She began to cry then, her body trembling with helpless anguish

Mark pulled her up to a sitting position. She struggled against him, sobbing. " Shut up, damn it," he said.

" Let me alone, please." She shook her head slowly from side to side, not fighting him any more, but lying limp in his arms. A strand of her long dark hair lay across her tear-streaked face, and her breath came in uneven gasps. " I want to cry, I want to be weak," she said. " I can't stand it any longer."

" Shut up and listen," he said. " You're blaming yourself for your husband's failure and your brother's. Why not blame them, for a change? Maybe they were a pair of fools. Maybe they were cowards. But they made the decisions, not you. And they're responsible. They can't blame it on their background, or their love life, or the fact that their mothers didn't like them. Not all of it, anyway. Damn it, men aren't moral spastics."

" Oh, you're so strong, so sure of yourself," she said, in an empty, bitter voice. " You want to prove that by helping people, and damn the consequences."

" Yes, that's it," he said slowly. He had caused trouble for her, he had blundered, but he had done what he thought was right. How could a man live with himself unless he trusted himself?

" Now, straighten up," he said sharply. " You think I took a chance with your brother's life and lost. All right, think what you want, but I need your help. We've got to stop Polov from taking Papa George back to Russia."

She didn't answer, and he stood up, lit a cigarette, and began pacing the floor. It was too late to call the Embassy. That would mean an ascent through channels, and by then Polov would be on his way. With Papa George.

He stopped in front of her and said: " I know what you're thinking. That I killed your brother. But you've got to help."

" I wasn't thinking that. Maybe I shall some day, but not now." She straightened her shoulders and pushed a strand of hair back from the clean, pale line of her forehead. After a slight pause, she said, " What do you want me to do? "

" An idea occurred to me a moment ago," he said. " First, I've got to make a phone call. Then we'll talk it over."

Mark called the Buonaparte Hotel, gave his name, and asked for Eduardo Ranalli. There was a considerable wait. Eduardo was probably in bed: it was now past midnight. He checked over his plan, twisting it this way and that, but finding no obvious holes in it. Everything hung on Eduardo, of course.

Then his friend's voice boomed in his ear: " Again and again fate keeps you in Rome. What is it this time? "

" I'm in trouble and I need your help."

" What kind of trouble? "

" I can't tell you. Will you do something for me, and not ask questions? "

" Only a fool would accept that proposition. What do you want to know? "

" First, is that man I asked you about last night still with you? Paul Tzara was his name. I want to know if he's in his room."

" I can do that much," Eduardo said, after a short pause. " Where are you? I'll call you back."

" The Wilson," Mark said, and gave him Amanda's room number.

Mark put the phone down and lit another cigarette. He glanced at Amanda, relieved that she asked no questions; patience was a rare virtue at a moment like this and he was grateful to her for it.

The phone rang sharply. He lifted the receiver, and Ranalli said, " Mark? "

" Yes? "

" He's here and in his room. But checking out soon. He's called the desk and asked them to prepare his account. Now what's going on? "

" In about half an hour he will get a telephone call from a woman. When she hangs up, Tzara will probably make two phone calls immediately. The first will be to the Ariosto. The second will be outside the city, I think. Now—"

" You're going in for mind-reading, eh? " Ranalli interrupted.

" This is no joke. Can you put both Tzara's calls through to a number which won't answer? "

" What's that? "

" I want him to think that the people he is phoning are not in."

Ranalli paused. Then he said slowly, " Well, that's possible, of course. I can take over the switchboard and put his calls through to some government office which will be closed at this time of the morning. But I won't do it, old friend."

Mark's hand tightened on the phone. " I've never been more serious in my life, Eduardo."

" I told you not to get mixed up with this fellow. What kind of trouble are you in? "

" I can't tell you now."

" Very well," Ranalli said, after another small pause. " We've been good friends, Mark. I'll do what you ask. The call will come from a woman in half an hour. Is that it? "

" That's it. Then Tzara will make two calls."

" You are certain he will phone the Ariosto? "

" I'm quite sure of it."

" Well, look here, old chap. The Ariosto *must* answer, don't you see? That hotel has a switchboard."

" Yes, of course," Mark said slowly.

" But never mind that. I can play the Ariosto for our friend. When he asks for a room number I just won't ring it. Then he'll think his party is out. Now, listen to me, Mark, old man: don't get in too deep. Do you understand me? These are not children and this is not a game. I can't imagine what you're involved in, but I don't like it a bit."

" I'll play safe," Mark said.

" Very well. Arrivederci, and God bless you."

" Arrivederci, Eduardo." Mark put the phone down and said to Amanda, " Did that make sense to you? "

She shook her head slowly.

" Paul Tzara is part of Polov's apparatus. He's the big fellow with the camera who followed us yesterday. You're going to call him in half an hour."

Mark sat beside her on the bed and held her hands.

" Now be sure you get this straight. You tell Tzara you have important information for Polov. Tell him you've tried to get Polov at the Ariosto but that he's not in his room. Have you got that? "

Her hands tightened in his and she nodded.

" Tell Tzara," Mark said, " that I know where Papa George is being kept, and that I've gone to get him. Then hang up. Don't answer any questions. Just hang up. That's all you have to do."

" I see what you've got in mind," she said slowly.

" It will work," Mark said. " First, Paul Tzara will try to get in touch with Polov to check your story. But Ranalli will put his call through to a number that won't answer. Next, Tzara may call wherever Papa George is being held. Again, he'll get no answer. Then he'll be in a vacuum, cut off from the outfit, unable to find out if your story is true or false. He'll have to act on his own then, and my guess is that he'll head for Papa George to intercept me."

" And you'll follow him."

" That's right." Mark looked at her searchingly: " Do you see anything wrong with it? "

" I don't know, I don't know," she said.

" It's O.K., I know it is," he said. This was his decision; he had no right to make her sit in judgment on it. He synchronized her travelling-clock with his wrist-watch, and then picked up his coat and hat. She came with him to the door and put a hand on his arm.

They looked at each other in silence for a moment. He saw the strain and worry in her face; her skin was almost transparently white, and there were purple shadows under her eyes. He was conscious of the light touch of her hand on his arm, and the deep warm stillness of the room.

There was a curious awkward intimacy between them; they knew each other too well in some respects, but not at all in others. He knew only the important things about her; but he didn't know if she liked flowers, or could tell a story well, or enjoyed sleeping late in the morning.

" Will you ring me as soon as you can? " she asked.

" Yes, of course." He wanted to kiss her good-bye but he knew that would be a wrong note. " Don't worry about me," he said, and patted her shoulder.

She leaned towards him slightly, and said, " Be careful, Mark," in a soft, blurred voice.

He touched her cheek with the back of his hand, and then walked quickly down the corridor to the lifts.

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The street was quiet when Mark came out of her hotel. The night had turned colder; the cab-drivers hunched behind their steering-wheels, faces nipped red by the sharp wind.

Mark told his driver to take him to the Ariosto, and the man turned about in the small piazza at the top of the Spanish Stairs, and headed back up the hill towards the Via Veneto, his motor loud and sluggish in the silence.

Everything seemed touched with a frightening sense of unreality. The tunnel-like look of the streets, the lurching turns of the cab, the roar of the engine—it was all grim and weird. Cut it out, he told himself, muttering the words aloud. You're like a child in a dark room, making bogy men and ghosts out of a dresser and a flapping curtain.

He was going first to the Ariosto to get a gun. There was a Luger in his baggage and he wanted it; there was no point in giving them every advantage. He hadn't fired the Luger, but he knew it was all right. He knew about guns, though he didn't like them, and he had gone over the Luger carefully, and was certain that it was a good weapon. It was for his boss in New York, who knew nothing about guns and loved them.

Mark told the driver to take him round to the rear of the hotel, because he didn't want to risk running into Polov or his men in the lobby.

The goods-lift operator took him up to his floor, after Mark explained that he was in a hurry and didn't want to go round to the front entrance. The operator accepted the excuse and a five-hundred-lira note with a good-humoured smile.

Mark's key was at the desk, so he prowled up and down the corridor, calling softly for the maid. Finally she popped out of a tiny closet-like room, blushing and rubbing her eyes sleepily. She unlocked his door, smiling oddly now, and when she strolled away, the grin lingered on her full handsome face.

Mark shrugged, pushing open the door, and then he realized that the lights were on, and smelt the tang of fresh cigarette smoke.

Maria, Johnny Dreyk's arrogant, childish little mistress, was sitting in a low armchair, her slender silken legs resting on an ottoman. She rose quickly as he closed the door, and came towards him, her hands locked over her breasts, a frightened, appealing look on her face.

"I had nowhere else to come to," she said, in a trembling voice.

"How the devil did you get in?"

"I told the maid I was your friend."

That explained the grin, Mark thought, glancing at his watch. He had fifteen minutes before Amanda would make her call to Paul Tzara. "What do you want?" he said.

"Johnny didn't phone me today," she said, studying his face anxiously. "I learnt he was here, and I came to his room, but those men with him told me to go away. They wouldn't let me see him. What kind of trouble is he in? Please tell me, please."

"I don't know, Maria."

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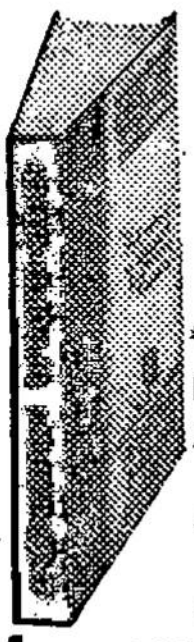

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"Please tell me," she said, touching his arm timidly. "Yesterday you wanted to see him. It was about this trouble, wasn't it?"

"O.K., he's in trouble," Mark said. He pulled his arm away from her tightening hand. "He's been asking for it for six years. And so have you. Fighting for the people's revolution with a lot of loose, childish talk at bars. Well, he's in the fight now, but it's not talk and it's not at a bar."

"How can I help him?" she said, beginning to cry.

"I've no idea," Mark said. He turned away from her and slung his suitcase onto the bed. Opening it, he removed the Luger, aware of the soft, helpless sound of her weeping. It angered him savagely. He rammed a clip of shells into the butt of the gun, checked the safety, dropped the gun into his pocket.

"Stop crying, can't you?" he said.

"No, I can't."

He dropped the holster on top of his shirts, and closed the case.

"What are you going to do?" she asked.

"I'm leaving."

"Are you going to help Johnny?"

He glanced at her. "What gave you that idea?" he said.

"You're in this trouble, too. You hate these men, don't you?"

"That's right."

"Let me help you."

"There's nothing you can do," he said. He started for the door, but she ran to him and caught hold of the lapels of his coat. She shook her head frantically. "Don't leave me, please. Let me help you. I'll do anything you say . . . I love him and I want to help him."

"Stop it, for God's sake," he said.

"No, I want to help him," she cried.

Mark broke the grip of her hands on his coat. There was no time for gentleness or compassion, no time for the anguish of this stupid little girl, he thought bitterly. She struggled against him like a child in a tantrum until he shoved her away from him and threw her roughly on the bed. She started to scramble to her feet, but something in his face and eyes stopped her, and she settled back slowly, supporting her weight on her elbows, and breathing in shallow, trembling gasps.

Mark stared down at her, his face pale and hard, hating the look of her, the slim silken legs, the ankle-strap sandals, the flawlessly sculptured little head with its cap of gleaming bronze hair.

Then the silly, illogical anger drained out of him, leaving him tired and empty. "I'm sorry, Maria," he said. "I didn't mean to hurt you."

"You hate me. I saw it."

"No, I don't hate you," he said slowly. That was true enough; the anger had been at himself, at his own weakness. Why did he have to worry about everybody in the world?

"Come on, let's go," he said irritably.

"Can I come with you?"

She might be useful, he thought, to carry a message or make a phone call. " Yes, get up," he said, and because he was being weak his voice was sharp and angry. " Come on, let's go."

She ran across the room, drying her eyes with the back of her hand, and picked up an imitation fur stole from a chair.

" I'm all ready," she said, twisting the stole about her slim shoulders. It was a very cheap fur, but her fine hard youth lent it a heart-breaking elegance.

They went down in the goods-lift, walked round the hotel, and started towards the Buonaparte, her high heels clicking rapidly along beside him on the pavement.

There were no pedestrians or traffic moving, the city was cold and quiet and still. Mark got a cab and told the driver to park about a hundred yards from the Buonaparte but on the opposite side of the street. They climbed into the back and he wound down the window to give him an unobstructed view of the canopied entrance to the hotel.

" What are you going to do? " she whispered, moving closer to him in the darkness.

" Don't let's talk," Mark said, keeping his eyes on the hotel. He was conscious of the unfamiliar but comforting weight of the gun in his pocket, but he tried not to think of that, or of anything at all . . .

Vasily Polov paced the floor of his room, smoking a short black cigar, and occasionally glancing sourly at Gregor, who sat in a straight-backed chair, his massive hands hanging limply between his legs. Johnny Dreyk was in the adjoining room, lying on the bed, staring at the ceiling.

" You hit one of them, eh? " Polov said in a jocular, railing voice. " That is excellent. You *think* it was the American, eh? " His eyes were cold and furious.

" They moved as I shot," Gregor said, in the tone a child would use to state a difficult proposition in algebra.

" You hit something, let us hope. Perhaps it was a dog."

" Someone was in the street shouting. I had to leave," Gregor said, avoiding Polov's eyes.

" Bah! " Polov said. He was fully dressed although it was now nearly two in the morning. There was work at hand, and he felt no need to sleep.

The phone rang then, to Gregor's obvious relief. Polov tilted his head, frowning thoughtfully, then crossed the room, and lifted the receiver. He listened for an instant, his expression changing subtly, and then said, " Yes, I understand. Yes. Thank you." He put the phone down slowly and stood perfectly still for a few moments, staring at the floor.

" Gregor," he said, at last, and the edge to his voice prodded the big man to his feet.

" Yes? "

" Pack some things for you and me in one bag. Go down and

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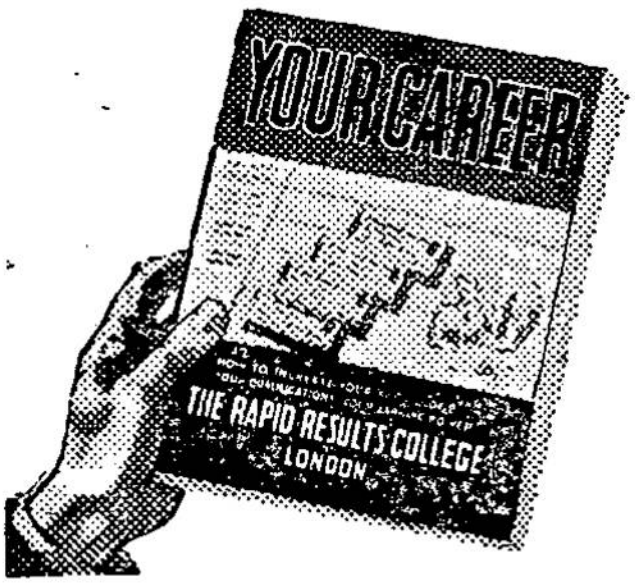

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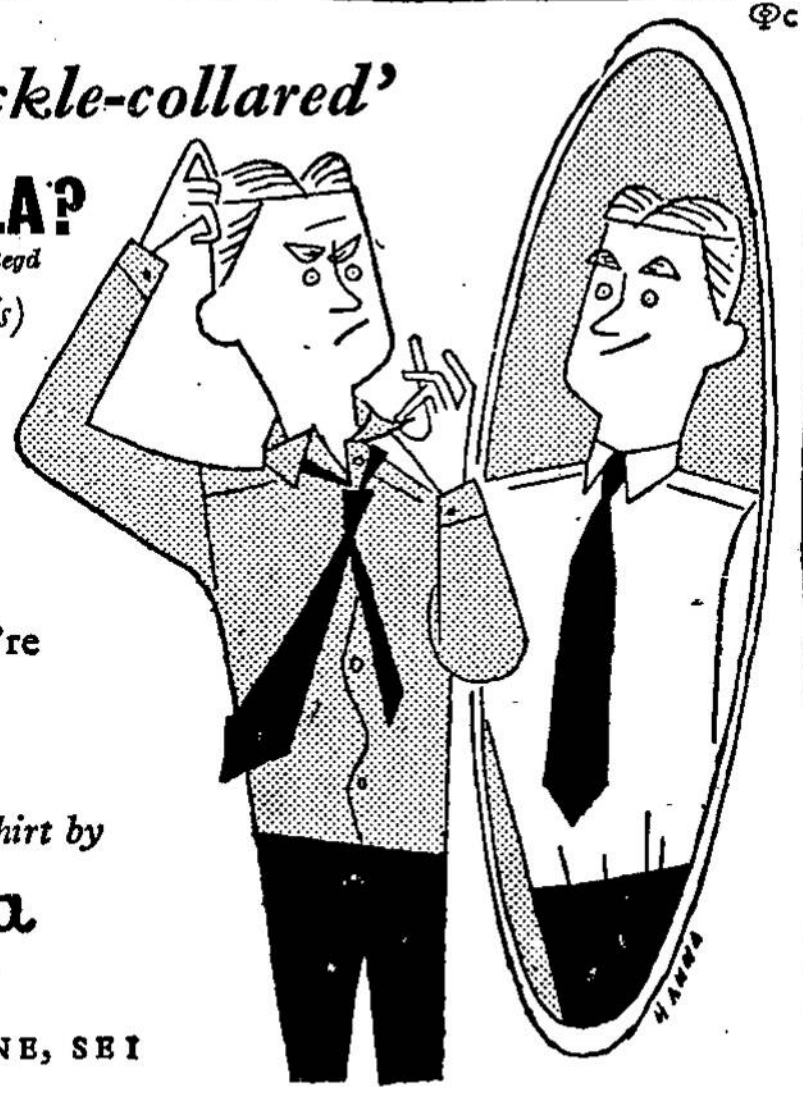

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bring the car to the front. Quickly," he said, snapping his fingers. " Call Peter from the lobby and tell him to come here."

Gregor went to work, pulling linen from a drawer, while Polov walked the floor, puffing on his cigar. Johnny Dreyk came in from the adjoining room. He had been jarred from his hopeless inertia by the urgency in Polov's voice. The two men ignored him, and he knew better than to ask questions. Polov glanced at him, irritated by the fear and uncertainty in his face.

" Gregor and I leave now," he said. " You will remain with Peter. He is a friend. Do as he tells you. In another forty-eight hours you may resume your interrupted existence—" he inspected his cigar and added drily, " full of pride at your part in this matter."

" What's happened? " Johnny asked.

Polov didn't bother to answer. He paced the floor, and thoughts and reflections were churning urgently in his mind. There was work now, and a pleasurably violent decision to make, but, as always, his consciousness blazed with images and memories from his past.

He watched Gregor close the suitcase and computed to the second the time it would take him to make the call to Peter and bring the car round to the entrance—but he also thought of a man he had once interrogated for seventy-two hours. A great defiant man with a mind like an anvil. Every weapon had flattened against it for three full days, but even anvils have breaking-points.

" That was a comrade who called now," he said, drily. " One of our Italian colonials. He is a gaoler at the city prison, and he had a message from Anton." Polov sighed humorously, but his eyes were cold and hard: " Anton, it appears, has been arrested. He met an obstacle. He reported his failure and now, I presume, is sleeping peacefully. I am surrounded by women on this mission."

Gregor left the room, the case dangling from his huge hand like a piece of doll's luggage.

" What am I supposed to do? " Johnny asked. The sense of impending action had excited him and restored some of his confidence. He almost grinned as he thought of his safe, objective position, high in the arena, far from danger.

" You can play cards with Peter for the next two days," Polov said.

" I'm not smart enough to be told what's going on. Is that it? "

" Such a question supports that conclusion," Polov said drily.

" You think I'm a silly, frightened weakling, don't you? " Johnny said, and his voice rose uncontrollably. Why did Polov make him feel so drained and impotent and despicable? And why this sense of painful, overwhelming loss? " You think you can treat me like dirt, laugh at me, sneer at me, do anything you want, and I'll just take it like a snivelling little wretch. Isn't that it? " He was trembling now, and he could feel his heart hammering wildly against his ribs.

" I don't think of you at all," Polov said. He was adjusting a thick black woollen muffler about his neck. " There isn't much

time to think in my work. If you could act without thinking, it would be an improvement; if you could think without talking, it would be an even greater one."

There was a tap on the door. Polov admitted a greying, slenderly built man who wore a loose brown tweed suit and a woollen sweater. His expression was mild, but his eyes were empty and dead. Except for that, he might have been taken for an assistant lecturer in history at some genteel, struggling college.

"You will stay here," Polov said to him, and nodded towards Johnny. "You will know when it's time for both of you to leave."

Peter rubbed his hands together vigorously. "Certainly. It's getting chilly, I think," he said to no one in particular.

Polov glanced at Johnny then, a faint, ironical smile on his lips. "Well, until we meet again," he said, and put out his hand.

For an instant Johnny stared back at him, determined to keep his arm at his side. They had played him for a fool, made him a virtual prisoner, and he'd be damned if he'd thank them for that treatment. But his hand rose slowly, almost of its own volition, and Polov squeezed it powerfully. His smile told Johnny that he knew all about this last struggle for a remnant of self-respect.

When Polov had gone, Peter glanced at Johnny with a friendly smile. "Do you play cards?" he said.

"No, damn it, I don't," Johnny said, and walked into the adjoining room. He wanted to shout, to push his fist through a pane of glass, anything to prove that he still had an identity and will. But he knew he wouldn't; that would be resistance and clever people didn't resist. Only fools and romantics went in for futile theatrical gestures of defiance.

Peter started to enter the room, but Johnny turned and said shrilly, "The door to the corridor is locked. Polov's got the key. I'm not going anywhere, damn you."

"Of course not," Peter said, smiling. "But it's a pity you don't enjoy cards, isn't it?"

She sat in a chair beside the telephone and watched the small patient face of the clock. The room was very still; the only sounds were the metronomic beat of the clock, and the faster beat of her heart.

Five minutes now, five minutes and she would lift the receiver and ask the operator for the Buonaparte Hotel. Then a wait. Then: "Mr. Paul Tzara, please."

She spoke the name softly, barely moving her dry lips, and continued the rehearsal in a whisper: "Mr. Tzara, I have something important to tell you. I couldn't reach Mr. Polov—" That's the way it would be, and on the other end of the connection a big, shrewd man, trained in these matters, would frown and listen for the lie in her voice.

Amanda lit a cigarette with trembling fingers and began pacing the floor. She had dressed, to distract herself and kill time. The black suit she wore fitted her hard slender body with snug elegance.

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She checked the heels of her sling-back shoes, the seams of her nylons, and then studied her face in the mirror.

She looked pale and anxious; her skin was the colour of chalk, and there were shadows under her eyes. To be doing something, she put on make-up hurriedly, and brushed her long dark hair. Then she sat beside the phone again and looked at the clock.

Two minutes. She crossed her legs and tried to compose herself, tried to think of nothing at all. But that was impossible. Too much had happened since she had seen Polov; there had been the fear, mounting steadily and unbearably, that she couldn't save her brother, and even more shattering than that, the new and confusing perspective she had got on herself in the last two days.

She had always considered herself a strong and controlled person—stronger than her dead husband, stronger than her brother. But she hadn't been able to help them; not only had she failed, she had made matters worse. And she had decided that trying to help others was useless and dangerous. Now she knew this was self-deluding nonsense.

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no illusion. He *was* strong, and he trusted himself to act when he thought he was in the right. That was the essence of strength and morality; she didn't have it but he did, without complications or pride. And she knew why she had resented him; not because she despised masterful men, as she'd always thought, but because she feared them. What had she been afraid of? A strong man, perhaps, one she couldn't feel sorry for and patronize.

She thought of Mark, in a splintered, guilty fashion. The toughness of his face, the gentleness of his eyes, the way he had fought tonight, his anger at her, and the big, strong look of his body. Why hadn't she thanked him?

She had wanted to kiss him before he left, not because of anything physical, but because she wanted to lose herself, if only for seconds, in his lack of fear. But he had walked away, and she hadn't thanked him for being here tonight, for saving her life.

She glanced at the clock, and her breath came faster. Now she must stop thinking of herself, it was time to call. She picked up the phone, marvelling at the steadiness of her hand, and asked for the Buonaparte.

There was a short wait, and then a man's voice, deeply resonant, said, " The Buonaparte."

" I'd like to speak to Mr. Paul Tzara."

There was the briefest pause. " All right. Everything's set here. Don't worry."

" Thank you." The silence stretched out from her, imprisoning her in a tight vacuum. She sat up straighter, gripping the receiver tightly, and then a man's voice sounded in her ear. The words were foreign to her, and she said, " Excuse me, but I'll have to speak in English. My name is Amanda Warren. I've got some important news for you."

" Yes? " His voice was polite but cautious.

" I couldn't reach Mr. Polov, that's why I'm calling you."

" I know nobody by that name. There must be a mistake."

" Oh yes, you do," Amanda said, gaining confidence from his lie. " There's an American here in Rome who knows about Papa George. He's on his way to get him now."

" This is confusing," the man said, but there was an edge of interest in his voice. " You speak so fast, and I do not understand the language so perfectly. Who are you, did you say? "

" I'm Amanda Warren."

She didn't hear them enter, or notice the faint draught from the opening door. The first intimation that she wasn't alone came suddenly and violently; the phone was ripped away from her, and a powerful hand was clamped over her mouth.

She twisted desperately . . .

★ ★ ★

The third (and last) part of William P. McGivern's "Margin of Terror" appears in next month's Argosy on sale September 10.

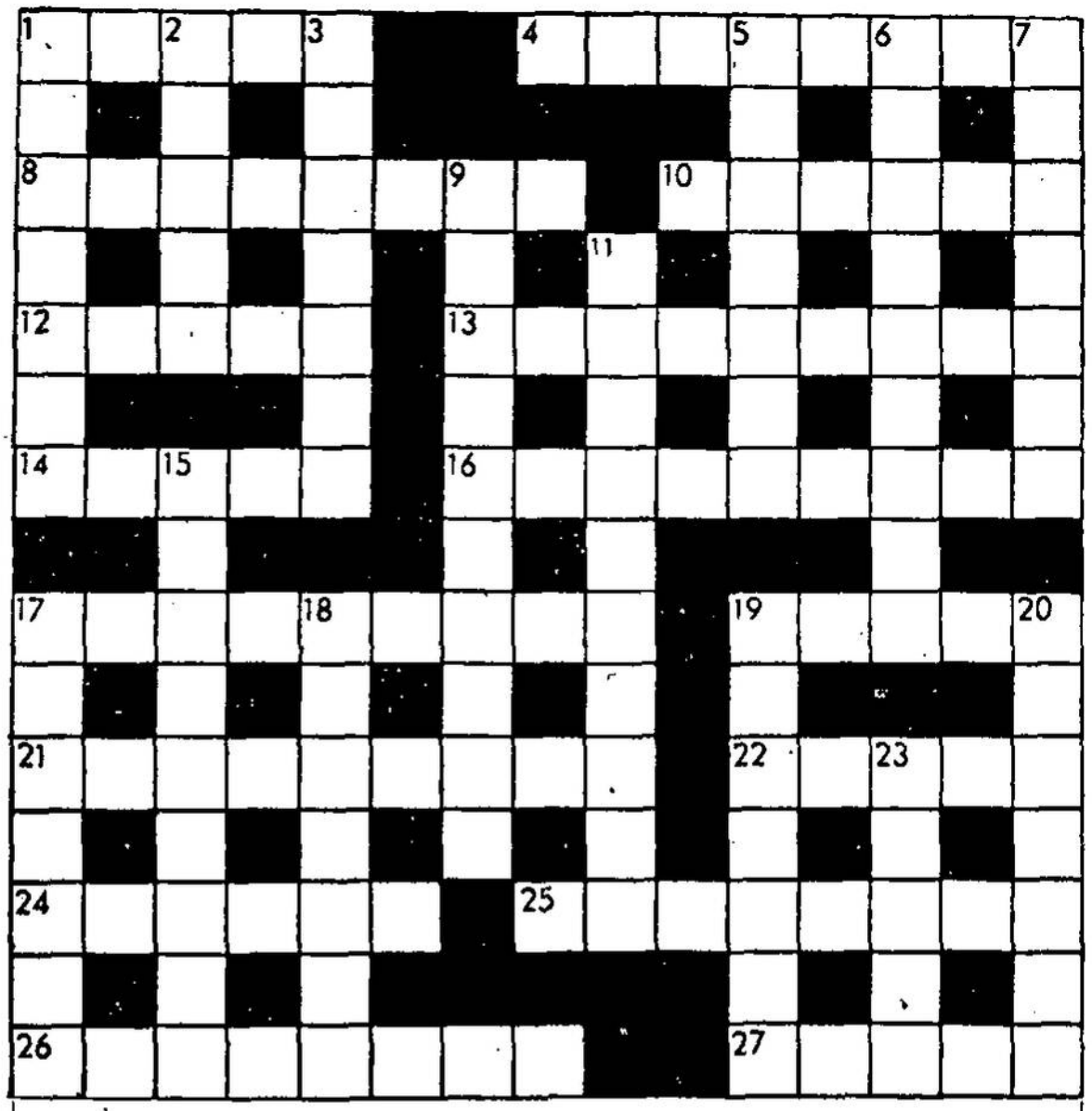
PRIZE CROSS-WORD

No. 16

★

Rules of Entry on Page 107

★



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CUT ALONG THE LINE

CLUES

Across

1 These birds are evidently apprehensive (5).

4 The fellow with the calendar has powers of government, too (8).

8 Hail, furies! On the whole, they're quite ordinary (8).

10 Press the fourth one (6).

12 The cheat's had a shaking. That'll learn him ! (5).

13 Restrain a classy chap to keep things clean (9).

14 Offer a certificate for the concealed competitor (5).

16 This old song might hold you up in the end (9).

17 Rich adept ? You needn't be to buy something that's this (4-5).

19 The vehicle for a Dickens lawyer (5).

21 This kind of bird-fancier starts off with a dress material (9).

22 Give Othello some tea and he becomes a machine (5).

24 In mixed coals I'm gregarious (6).

25 " Where perhaps some beauty lies, The —— of neighbouring eyes " (Milton) (8).

26 A valuable fictional island (8).

27 " They haven't got no ——, the fallen sons of Eve " (Chesterton) (5).

Down

1 Merciful fraction (7).

2 Academician goes round east by north for the circus (5).

3 Heel rat ; with this, perhaps (7).

5 Someone has lost his title, but he still seems to be wanted (7).

6 De la Mare's asked if there was anybody there (9).

7 We style confusedly but charmingly (7).

9 This is not necessarily the first fruit (10).

11 Bitter festivity appropriate to a portly individual (5, 5).

15 A red stone that begins with a vehicle and ends relatively (9).

17 Is up in the depot (7).

18 Weapon that seems to be aimed at a girl (7).

19 To begin with, the satire must throw light on the subject (7).

20 They may be bowled, but not when they're new (7).

23 The French city gets about, it seems (5).

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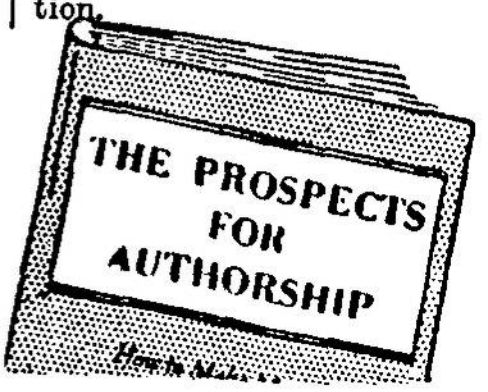
Student 357/3015: I have had my story accepted by **BLACKWOODS** who are paying me £25 for it . . . *Student* 778/2119: I thought it might interest you to know that **THE COUNTRYMAN** has accepted a short article of mine on an old country custom . . . *Student* 184/315: As you suggested, I submitted the articles to the **NEW STATESMAN.** One was published on the 17th July. I have also had an article accepted by **MEN ONLY** . . . *Student* 181/282: You may be interested to hear that I had a letter from the Editor of **ARGOSY**; they offered me Twenty-five Guineas for my story . . . *Student* 591/287: You will be pleased that my article submitted for my Second Lesson was published in the **DAILY MIRROR** and I received Six Guineas for it . . . *Student* 120/288: I have established contact with the Editor of **PUNCH.** The item was accepted for "Charivaria" and is a good start . . . *Student* 1179/347: I succeeded in getting four Big Game stories into **COURIER** and another about "Shrove Tuesday." Another article appeared in the August issue of **BLACKWOODS** . . . *Student* 1954/157: I have just corrected a proof of my story for **WIDE WORLD**: they have since accepted another and I have sent in a third . . . *Student* 171/162: I have sold my story to **EVERYWOMAN** for 25 guineas . . . *Student* 1106/156: The B.B.C. accepted the script for the Light Programme—fee 9 guineas—after my first lesson . . . *Student* 141/76: The article which I wrote for the Second Test paper appeared in the **SUNDAY MAIL.** Thanks for the recommendation.